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SPONTANEITY IN ACTING:

an analysis of the views of major twentieth century acting theoretricians

by

(C) TERENCE W. WELSH

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Spontaneity in Acting: an Analysis of the Views of Major Twentieth Century Acting Theoretricians, submitted by Terence W. Welsh in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the concept of spontaneity in acting, through an analysis of the theories and methodologies of spontaneity put forward by six of the twentieth century's leading theoretricians: Constantin Stanislavski, Richard Boleslavsky, Michael Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski, Robert Benedetti, and Viola Spolin. It begins by setting forth the terms of reference for selection and examination of the theoretricians. Each theoretrician is then dealt with separately and the results of the various examinations are analyzed with analysis and conclusions presented in the final chapter.

The theories of each theoretrician regarding spontaneity are examined and analyzed in three ways. First, how does the theoretrician define spontaneity in acting? Second, in what ways can spontaneity be identified; what are its characteristics? Third, how important is the concept of spontaneity to each theoretrician's overall theoretical perspective on acting? The methodologies of spontaneity developed by each theoretrician are then examined to determine the various techniques by which they achieve this quality in acting.

The thesis determines that the theoretricians define three aspects to spontaneity in acting: spontaneity of will; of action; and of emotion. All three involve direct interactions between the actor's physical being and his subconscious, and all three demonstrate that at any given moment acting is either spontaneous or unspontaneous. Analysis

further reveals that an extensive and varied terminology has been put forward by the theoretricians to describe both spontaneity and lack of spontaneity in acting. This terminology is presented in detail and differences in the way certain terms are utilized by the theoretricians are identified.

The numerous characteristics of spontaneity identified by the theoretricians are presented. These characteristics fall into two categories: those which are perceptible to the actor; and those which can be perceived by the spectator. The thesis reveals numerous similarities among the theoretricians in their views regarding the manifestations of spontaneity, including the identification of specific physical and psychological states. The thesis further reveals that, in the views of the six theoretricians under scrutiny, spontaneity is the single most essential quality in acting.

Regarding methodology, a number of similarities and differences are apparent in the techniques of spontaneity described by the theoretricians. All adopt the premises that spontaneity can be taught and that obstacles to spontaneity can be identified and overcome by the actor. All identify similar causes for lack of spontaneity in acting. Specific approaches vary from one theoretrician to another, but all promote the achievement of spontaneity through the conscious perception and manipulation of real or imaginary phenomena.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The concept of spontaneity has been addressed directly or, more often, indirectly by every major twentieth century acting theorist and teacher. Frequently, their ideas, experiences, and instructional methods reflect similar views and understandings about the concept. However, variances in style, terminology, and philosophy have made the underlying similarities much less apparent. In order to reach a clearer understanding and appreciation of spontaneity, one must first draw together the ideas, experiences, and methods of those acting theorists and practitioners who have made a significant contribution to the teaching of the actor. Through a comparative analysis of the views of these individuals regarding spontaneity in acting, it becomes possible to discern certain commonalities of theory and methodology which can serve to illuminate the concept.

Spontaneity is generally considered a vital aspect of twentieth century Western acting. Nonetheless, spontaneity as a concept remains, for the most part, outside areas of critical examination undertaken by most practitioners. In the evaluation of an actor's performance, spontaneity is noted more by its absence than by its presence; and in the training of the actor, spontaneity is often considered a part of that elusive, intuitive realm of inspiration. As such, it is perceived as a quality of acting more to be hoped for than

consciously pursued. Still, whether it is regarded as beyond the will of the actor or subject to it, the quality of spontaneity remains an important, even a vital, characteristic of an actor's work.

Even as the cornerstones were being laid for twentieth century Western acting, spontaneity was a central issue. The writings of M. Diderot were under increasing attack from theorists such as William Archer, whose views on the emotionalist versus anti-emotionalist acting debate reflect the growing nineteenth century awareness that certain desirable qualities of acting might be related to the actor's own inner emotional processes.[1] It remained, however, for a select number of twentieth century theoretricians, led and inspired by Constantin Stanislavski, to identify and articulate the principles of spontaneity in acting, That the theoretical aspects of spontaneity put forward by these individuals have been largely overshadowed by a latter-day preoccupation with their methodologies on the part of actors and acting teachers does not lessen the significance of the theoretical work. It is all the more necessary that the views of these few dramatic 'scientists' regarding spontaneity be held up to scrutiny, so that much of what has been hitherto implicitly accepted about the nature and importance of this much sought-after quality in acting can be made explicit.

It is also important that certain of the assumptions and connotations for the term, 'spontaneity', be addressed. The term has, in some instances, become a catch-word for any non-scripted theatrical event. J.L. Moreno's "theatre of spontaneity" is one illustration of the assumption that spontaneity refers to the forms of word and action more than to the inner experience of the actor.[2] This applica-

tion of the term to describe a particular dramatic genre wherein text and stage blocking are created on the instant has clouded the deeper considerations of spontaneity as a quality which may be found (or may be lacking) in both scripted and improvisational dramatic activity, in both the spur-of-the-moment 'happening' and the heavily rehearsed repertory piece. The theories and the methodologies examined herein reveal and reflect an understanding and appreciation of spontaneity as a significant element in any acting, and may serve to rescue the term from its more trendy and superficial usages, restoring it to its rightful place in the common vocabulary of the working actor and acting teacher.

The theoretricians will be examined on four key questions concerning spontaneity: is spontaneity a necessary and desirable quality in acting; is there a common theory of spontaneity underlying the various methods and vocabularies of the theoretricians; can a common vocabulary concerning the concept of spontaneity be formulated; can spontaneity be taught--are there specific methods and exercises by which spontaneity may be consciously induced in an actor. The first three questions will be considered through an examination of the various theories put forward by the selected individuals. The fourth question will involve an examination of their methodologies. Thus, the analysis of each theoretrician falls into two main areas: theory and methodology.

In examining the theoretical views of each of the theoretricians, both stated and inferred views will be considered. The conclusion or principle put forward by the individual can frequently be

inferred from its context, even where style or terminology is unclear. The views are analyzed according to three aspects:

1. How is spontaneity (or lack of spontaneity) defined?
2. What are the criteria by which spontaneity and lack of spontaneity in the actor can be identified? How is it manifested?
3. How important is spontaneity to the actor? How important is it for the audience?

For each of these areas of theory--definition, recognition, and importance--the views of each theoretrician are presented and analyzed. In the concluding chapter, areas of similarity and contrast among them will be considered.

After theory, the second area in which the theoretricians will be examined is the area of methodology. In addition to general consideration of the question of whether or not it is possible to teach or learn spontaneity in acting, each theoretrician's own methodology of spontaneity will be considered. Analysis will be in three areas: identifying the obstacles or impediments to spontaneity; outlining the various approaches undertaken by the theoretrician; describing the specific exercise or exercises within each approach. In the concluding chapter, the various methodologies will be compared and the following questions considered:

1. Is there any <u>one</u> way to induce spontaneity in acting?
2. What common obstacles/impediments to spontaneity are identified?
3. Are there similarities of approach among the theoretricians? What are the most common approaches?
4. Are certain approaches commonly identified as useful for particular

circumstances, problems, or kinds of actors?

5. Do the methodologies, collectively or individually, provide insights into the nature of spontaneity?

The criteria for selection of the theoretricians to be examined in this thesis are as follows:

1. Each has achieved significant recognition as a theatre practitioner, teacher, and theorist in the twentieth century.
2. Each has produced at least one comprehensive work on the subject of acting; more specifically, on the teaching of acting.
3. Each has developed methods and approaches which have gained world-wide recognition and acceptance.
4. Each has demonstrated a commitment to identifying the basic principles as the foundation for a teaching methodology.

In accordance with the above criteria, six theoretricians have been selected for examination in this thesis. They are: Constantin Stanislavski, Richard Boleslavsky, Michael Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski, Viola Spolin, and Robert Benedetti.

Stanislavski meets all the criteria in perhaps the fullest measure of the six. His initiation and development of a process, including both theory and methodology, for the teaching of acting forms the basis of twentieth century acting technique and instruction in the Western world. His two disciples, Richard Boleslavsky and Michael Chekhov, carried the process of inquiry further, and have provided much of the impetus for the development of North American acting training and technique.

Jerzy Grotowski developed an entire methodology of acting and acting instruction grounded in an exploration of the actor's innerself. He has been widely regarded as a modern day successor to Stanislavski, both for his accomplishments and his spirit of inquiry. If this spirit has since impelled him into areas beyond theatre as it is generally recognized, this in no way diminishes the value and brilliance of his earlier work.

Viola Spolin and Robert Benedetti both embody recent and widely utilized methodologies for the teaching of acting. Unlike the other four, their understanding of the basic principles of dramatic theory has led them into the development of techniques which can be applied not only to the professional actor, but to the neophyte, non-professional, and younger actor as well.

It may be argued that other renowned twentieth century theatre researchers and practitioners, such as Antonin Artaud, Bertholt Brecht, and Peter Brook, should have been included. However, both Artaud and Brecht were concerned not so much with the development of a teaching methodology based upon fundamental principles of acting theory, as with the evolution of a style of acting consistent with their philosophies of theatre. Perhaps as a partial result of this single-mindedness, neither Brecht or Artaud pursued roles as acting teachers to any significant extent, and are thus not widely recognized in this regard. A stronger case might be made for the inclusion of Peter Brook. His methodologies, however, have not yet received the kind of worldwide application which would give them weight, and his book, The Empty Space, even when coupled with the numerous documentations

of his endeavours, does not go very far in the presentation of a methodology for training the actor, though it addresses admirably the more general problem of the survival of theatre as an art form.[3]

There are no doubt other worthy candidates who are even now penetrating the field of acting theory with great competence and vigour, but it remains for time to bring them the kind of recognition they may yet deserve.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Archer, William. Masks or Faces? A study in the psychology of acting. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888. p. 11

[2]Moreno, J. L. The Theatre of Spontaneity. New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1973

[3]Brook, Peter. The Empty Space. London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968

CHAPTER TWO

CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

Theory

Constantin Stanislavski's research into the basic theoretical principles of acting is directed toward the achievement of a quality of acting which he found rare in the established contemporary theatre. This quality is not to be found in the 'representational' actor, who predetermines, memorizes, and reproduces a series of lifelike gestures, expressions, and movements in his portrayal of a role; nor is it detected in the 'mechanical' actor, whose role is a synthesis of established theatrical cliches and picturesque effects which pretend to portray feelings through external means. It is not to be seen in the 'exhibitionistic' actor, who builds his role around a cliched or generalized set of physical characteristics and personality traits; nor in the 'exploitive' actor, who uses the role as a means of presenting to the audience his own best features or talents. The quality for which Stanislavski searched, and towards which his whole theory is directed, is spontaneity. It is found in that process of acting wherein the actor 'lives his part', actually experiencing the emotional life of his character as the role is played out moment to moment. It is that process of acting wherein the actor plays 'truly':[1]

> To play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel, and act in unison with your role. . . .

> If you take all these internal processes, and adapt them to the spiritual and physical life of the person you are representing, we call that living the part.[2]

In this process, the actor "does not simply put on an act," rather he "experiences what he does as a human being"; he does not "indulge in theatrical pretense," but "feels, instead of imitating the results of feelings"[3] Stanislavski contrasts this spontaneous process with other approaches to acting:

> . . . all of you began your work at the end instead of at the beginning. You were determined to arouse tremendous emotion in yourselves and your audience right at the start; to offer them some vivid images, and at the same time exhibit all your inner and outer gifts. . . . In the beginning forget about your feelings. When the inner conditions are prepared, and right, feelings will come to the surface of their own accord.[4]

To Stanislavski, spontaneity is a quality of acting wherein the life of a character is not imitated, approximated, theatrically stylized, or used to the actor's own purpose, but is <u>experienced</u> by the actor as he plays. It is a two way process:

> In each physical act there is an inner psychological motive which impels physical action, as in every psychological inner action there is also physical action, which expresses its psychic nature.[5]

Thus, the actions of the character give rise to the emotional life of the actor, which in turn imbues his actions with emotional depth and meaning. This "true organic action" will automatically "give rise to sincere feelings."[6] Spontaneity is therefore not simply the general experiencing of emotions by the actor on the stage (Stanislavski calls this latter state a kind of "theatrical hysteria"[7]); it is the quality of acting characterized by the generation of <u>specific</u> emotions in the actor directly and automatically through experiencing the inner and

outer life of the character:[8]

> The actor's entire spiritual and physical nature should be involved in what is happening to the character he has imagined. In moments of "inspiration," the spontaneous exaltation of all his faculties, this is what happens to an actor.[9]

Stanislavski does not employ the specific term, spontaneity, in naming this quality of acting, though the term appears frequently in his descriptions of the acting process. Besides the phrases 'living the part', 'playing truly', and acting 'with inspiration', he describes spontaneous acting as "organic,"[10] "intuitive,"[11] "subconscious,"[12] and "involuntary."[13] He also offers a wealth of terms to describe acting which does not possess spontaneity, including "imitating,"[14] "forces acting,"[15] "general acting,"[16] "artificial acting,"[17] "stereotyping,"[18] "cliche acting,"[19] "ham acting,"[20] and "pretense,"[21] as well as the previously mentioned 'representational', 'mechanical', 'exhibitionistic', and 'exploitive' approaches. Through this substantial terminology, Stanislavski demonstrates by implication the large number of acting styles which, while widely accepted during his lifetime, did not involve living one's part, and so were antithetical to the achievement of spontaneity.

In Stanislavski's view, the characteristics of spontaneity should be apparent to both actor and spectator; particularly the former. One of his students, Vsevelod Meyerhold, identifies one such characteristic in "The 225th Studio," as he describes his experience of spontaneity in carrying out an exercise prescribed for him by Stanislavski

when he found himself unable to deliver his lines convincingly and with an inner sense of truth. In the exercise Stanislavski instructs Meyerhold to speak some of the lines, move to a folded piece of paper lying on the floor, pick it up, return to his place, unfold the paper and look at it, then continue his lines:

> When I started the speech and then picked up the paper, it was a real action, and since we live by experience, the gesture of picking up that scrap of paper became a conditioned reflex which brought a living intonation to my lines.[22]

In addition to the 'living intonation' mentioned by Meyerhold, Stanislavski identifies several other characteristics which the actor will consciously experience, and a smaller number which the audience will perceive. Those which manifest themselves to the actor include: freedom of <u>will</u>--a freedom from the desire to focus upon his performance and how it is coming across to the audience, power of <u>concentration</u>--an ability to be completely perceptive to what is happening in the play; sense of <u>relaxation</u>--an absence of physical tension coupled with a sense of physical freedom and muscular control; <u>emotional involvement</u>--an ability to act and react to the circumstances of the play; to respond emotionally.

The term spontaneity comes from the Greek root word meaning 'free-will', and it is this freedom to willfully enter into the dramatic circumstances with one's entire organism which, in Stanislavski's view, characterizes the spontaneous actor. This freedom of will means that the actor no longer has the need to engage in consciously noticing, evaluating, or playing to himself or to the audience; he is able to "forget entirely about the audience" and direct his mind "solely on the characters in the play";[23] he "lives the part, not noticing <u>how</u> he

feels, not thinking about what he does."[24] The unspontaneous actor, on the other hand, "plays in the first instance for the audience and not for his fellow actors."[25]

The spontaneous actor also experiences a heightened ability to concentrate, to enter into an "inner and outer creative state," in which:

> It is easy to react to all the problems the play, the director, and finally you yourself put forward for solution. All your inner resources and physical capabilities are on call, ready to respond to any bid.[26]

He is thus able "to listen and observe on the stage as he would in real life, that is to say to be in contact with the person opposite him."[27] The unspontaneous actor's concentration is of a different quality, as he focuses upon himself, the audience, or the careful representation of certain aspects of his role; he may be only superficially aware of the other characters on the stage.

The third characteristic of spontaneity in the actor is his relaxed and well-controlled physical state, "free of muscular tensions which unconsciously take hold of us when we are on the stage."[28] Lack of spontaneity shows itself in excess tension, a feeling of stiffness or awkwardness.

The fourth way to differentiate the spontaneous from the non-spontaneous actor is the former's ability to experience actual emotions on the stage, emotions which grow out of his experiencing of the character and the play, as "every feeling, every mood that wells up inside. . . is reflexively expressed."[29] The unspontaneous actor will find that he "imitates the external manifestations of his feelings, or he attempts to 'squeeze out' some emotion for his part, tries to 'impress' himself

with them."[30]

From the audience's perspective as well, the spectator will often be sensible to the difference between the spontaneous and the non-spontaneous actor. He will notice, like Michel St. Denis, who writes of a Stanislavski production of The Cherry Orchard in 1922:

> . . . not a single cliche among the characters, not a single attitude, gesture, or sound that might create the impression of the "already-seen" or "already-heard" . . . each second was a miracle of creative invention, originality, and spontaneity.[31]

By contrast, the unspontaneous actor's gestures and rendering of the text may seem artificial or unnatural; he may appear "lifeless,"[32] "stilted,"[33] "awkward,"[34] or "exaggerated."[35]

Audiences are not always perceptive to lack of spontaneity, however, particularly if the actor is clever and well-practised. The artificial intensity of the 'hysterical' actor, for example, is "often thought by the public to be an expression of a powerful temperament aroused by passion."[36] Thus, Stanislavski is particularly concerned that the actor himself be aware of--and honest about--the presence or absence of spontaneity in his own acting.

In Stanislavski's view, spontaneity is crucial to the art of the theatre. . . . "The art of the theatre must be the art of experiencing, not merely presenting a part."[37] While other forms of acting may possess a certain artistry, Stanislavski maintains that their power and significance are both different and less. He describes the difference between representational theatre and living one's part:

You can receive great impressions through this[repre-

> sentational] art. But they will neither warm your soul nor penetrate deeply into it. Their effect is sharp but not lasting. Your astonishment rather than your faith is aroused. Only what can be accomplished through surprising theatrical beauty, or picturesque pathos, lies within the bounds of this art. But delicate and deep human feelings are not subject to such technique. They call for natural emotions at the very moment in which they appear before you in the flesh. They call for the direct cooperation of nature itself.[38]

If the public does not realize what it is missing, or is satisfied with less, this does not lessen the importance of spontaneous acting to Stanislavski:

> We are not interested in hit and run impressions, here today and gone tomorrow. We are not satisfied merely with visual and audible effects. What we hold in highest regard are impressions made on the emotions, which leave a lifelong mark on the spectator and transforms actors into real, living beings whom one may include in the roster of one's near and dear friends, whom one may love, feel one's self akin to, whom one goes to the theatre to visit again and again.[39]

So it is that the truly great actor ". . . should be full of feeling, and especially he should feel the thing he is portraying. He must feel an emotion not only once or twice while he is studying his part, but to a greater or lesser degree every time he plays it, no matter whether it is the first or the thousandth time."[40] Stanislavski echoes Salvini: "In our art you must live the part every moment that you are playing it, and every time. Each time it is re-created it must be lived afresh and incarnated afresh."[41]

In stressing the centrality of 'living the part', Stanislavski challenges the conventional theatre of his day:

> The approach we have chosen--the art of living a part--rebels with all the strength it can muster against those other current 'principles' of acting. We assert the contrary principle that the main factor in any form of creativeness is the life of a human spirit, that of the actor and his part, their joint feelings and subconscious creation. . . .

> These cannot be "exhibited"; they can only be produced spontaneously or as the result of something that has gone before. One can only feel them;[42]

and extends the challenge to all theatre, for all time:

> The more immediate, spontaneous, vivid, precise the reflection you produce from inner to outer form, the better, broader, fuller will be your public's sense of the inner life of the character you are portraying on the stage. It is for this that plays are written and the theatre exists.[43]

Methodology

In his textbooks, An Actor Prepares, Building a Character, and Creating a Role, as well as in other writings such as those collected in Stanislavski's Legacy, Constantin Stanislavski presents a substantial acting methodology, many aspects of which are directed towards the achievement of spontaneity. Stanislavski's approaches to spontaneity are not ordered into a single, step-by-step sequence, but are offered as a collection of methods, each of which achieves spontaneity in its own way and also reinforces the other approaches. Stanislavski encourages the actor to explore all the various approaches, and to undertake them in whatever combination or sequence seems appropriate to the actor's own capabilities and to the role.

Though sequencing is not a factor in Stanislavski's methodology, one aspect of his method appears to be a consistent initial step in the training of the actor. This aspect is the actor's recognition and understanding of the basis for lack of spontaneity in acting:

> . . . strangely enough, when we step on to the stage we lose our natural endowment and instead of acting crea-

> tively we proceed to perform contortions of pretentious proportions. What drives us to do this? The condition of having to create something in public view. Forced, conventional untruthfulness is implicit in stage presentation, in the foisting on us of the acts and words prescribed by an author, the scenery designed by a painter, the production devised by a director, in our own embarrassment, stage fright, the poor taste and false traditions which cramp our natures. All these impel an actor to exhibitionism, insincere representation.[44]

Thus, lack of spontaneity can be traced either to habits developed through the actor's prior training and experience, or to motivational causes. The former may include acting "in general, for the sake of action,"[45] imitating feelings or the results of feelings,[46] and any number of theatrical cliches, mechanical or representational gestures and actions. Motivational causes, which result in "the very worst kind of acting,"[47] include the need or desire to "impress the spectators,"[48] the desire to "gain popularity or external success or to make a career."[49]

Stanislavski maintains that an appropriate methodology based on the underlying principles of acting will allow the actor to overcome habits and personal motivations and to achieve the quality of spontaneity in his art. Stanislavski's own system was in a continual state of evolution and change as he sought out new ways to accomplish this basic aim. Throughout its development, however, three principles remained constant:

> . . . the principle of activity . . . indicative of the fact that we do not play character images and emotions <u>but act in the images and passions</u> of a role. . . .
> . . . the work of an actor is not to create feelings but only to <u>produce the given circumstances in which true feelings will spontaneously be engendered</u>. . . .
> . . . we express (the third cornerstone) in the words: <u>Through conscious technique to the subconscious creation of artistic truth</u>.[50]

Stanislavski's 'conscious technique' consists of four major aspects: a) the 'creative state', including relaxation, concentration, and imagination; 2) physical and psychological 'objectives'; 3) 'physical actions'; and 4) 'tempo-rhythm'. His exercises appear to address more than one aspect at a time, and may in fact touch all four aspects at once; Stanislavski provides a 'way in' to a given exercise, however, by focusing on one particular aspect at a time.

The 'creative state' is to Stanislavski a "normal living state on stage,"[51] wherein "intuition and imagination are released."[52] In this state the actor is "ready instantly and exactly to reproduce most delicate and all but intangible feelings with great sensitivity and directness."[53] So that the actor is enabled to experience the 'creative state', Stanislavski sets exercises designed to make the actor "physically free, in control of free muscles," to make his attention "infinitely alert" so that he will "listen and observe on the stage as he would in real life," and to help him "believe in everything that is happening on the stage that is related to the play." The exercises are to be done "every day, the way a singer vocalizes or a pianist does his finger exercises."[54]

Exercises to free and control the muscles include: relaxation; fencing, gymnastics, acrobatics, dancing, and movement for the body; diction, singing, intonation, and accentuation for the voice. Relaxation is the most critical of these exercises, emphasizing the identification of those muscles which are the sources of tension within the body, and the conscious and deliberate relaxing of them: "This process

of self-observation and removal of unnecessary tenseness should be developed to the point where it becomes a subconscious, mechanical habit."[55]

After 'relaxation' and the other physical exercises, the second group of exercises which help to develop the actor's 'creative state' are in 'concentration'--the actor's mental alertness and ability to listen and observe on stage. Concentration exercises described by Stanislavski include 'point of attention', 'circle of attention', and 'internal attention'; generally these are handled sequentially. In the first two sets, attention is focused upon external elements in the stage space. In a 'point of attention' exercise, the actor focuses his concentration upon a particular object or location in the space, such as a vase on a mantelpiece, and tries to maintain a continuous, active interest in it;[56] in 'circle of attention', the actor extends the same level of intense ongoing interest to the group of objects that lie within a particular radius around him.[57] The third set, 'internal attention' exercises, demand that the actor focus his attention upon objects and situations which exist solely in his imagination. The latter are the most difficult of the three sets: ". . . material things around us on the stage call for a well-trained attention, but imaginary objects demand an even far more disciplined power of concentration."[58]

The last group of exercises which help the actor to establish his 'creative state' are exercises in 'imagination'. The primary function of imagination exercises is to prepare the actor's imagination to accept and believe in the various aspects of his character and the

play. Stanislavski bases these exercises on a concept he calls "the magic if."[59] In the 'magic if', the actor sets the proposition, "I am I, but if I were. . ." and thus frees his imagination to answer the questions 'what would I want', 'what would I do', and 'what would I experience'. Thus the 'magic if' frees the actor from trying to impersonate or approximate an imaginary object, role, or situation, allowing him to question and penetrate more deeply into the truth of his role. The actor can then begin to explore some of the hypotheses which his imagination suggests to him.[60] In exercises involving the 'magic if', the actor is encouraged to ascribe to certain objects or situations meanings which do not in actuality exist. The simpler exercises are closely tied to 'internal attention' exercises, as the actor creates an object in his own imagination, such as a fire in a hearth, and tries to make his image as 'real' as possible. More demanding exercises follow. For example, the actor fixes his attention on a particular situation, such as sitting in the acting classroom, and then imagines that it is 3:00 P.M., or that it is spring instead of fall, or that ordinary chairs are houses, or a forest. These latter exercises Stanislavski calls "transformations."[61] More difficult exercises involve the imagining of an entire story or sequence of events with such a degree of concentration and sense of reality that the actor finds himself responding emotionally to it:

> Then as an active participant in this imaginary life you will no longer see yourself, but only what surrounds you, and to this you will respond inwardly, because you are a real part of it.[62]

For Stanislavski, once this point in the 'creative state' is reached, the actor will have spontaneous access to his emotions as the direct

interplay between imagination and the "external experiences" of the role causes an infinite variety of emotional shadings and tones to be synthesized in the actor's subconscious:[63]

> The musical scale has only seven notes, the sun's spectrum only seven primary colours, yet the combinations of those notes in music and those colours in paintings are not to be numbered. The same must be said of our fundamental emotions which are preserved in our affective (emotion) memory, just as things seen by us in the external world are preserved in our intellectual memory: the number of these fundamental emotions in our own inner experience is limited, but the shadings and combinations are as numerous as the combinations created out of our external experience by the activity of our imagination.[64]

This direct interplay between imagination and the externals of the role is catalyzed through use of the 'magic if':

> And from the instant that his soul is aware of the magic phrase "if it were," the actual world around him ceases to interest him, he is carried off to another plane, to a life created by his imagination.[65]

In approaching spontaneity via the 'creative state', then, it is Stanislavski's view that the elements of relaxation and muscular control, of concentration, and of imagination, must all be developed to establish a channel to the actor's emotions. Sequencing of these elements appears to be important, as tension impedes concentration, lack of concentration impedes imagination, and lack of imagination prevents emotional involvement:

> . . . if an actor is to be emotionally involved and pushed into action on the stage by the imaginary world he builds on the basis of what the playwright has created, it is necessary that he believe in it as thoroughly as he does in the real world which surrounds him.[66]

Stanislavski regards the 'creative state', and particularly its third component, 'imagination', as a vital means to living one's part. In referring to the actor's ability to believe, he states that the actor

"must develop it, or else leave the theatre."[67]

In An Actor Prepares, Stanislavski states that "rehearsals are taken up, in the main, with finding the right objectives."[68] Objectives are the second means put forward by Stanislavski for achieving spontaneity in acting. The importance of the objective lies in its power to generate spontaneity in the actor's physical actions; thus, the objective is a statement of the character's desire or intent, and, armed with this clear intent, the actor discovers that the character's physical actions flow directly as a result of trying to achieve or accomplish it. Underlying the principle of the objective is that the actor must not "act in general, for the sake of action," but must always "act with a purpose."[69] Stanislavski's rationale is that life, both on stage and off, "consists of an uninterrupted series of objectives and their attainment":[70]

> This unbroken series of outbursts of human desires develops the continuous movement of our creative will, it establishes the flow of inner life, it helps the actor to experience the living organism of his part.[71]

Stanislavski classifies all objectives as either 'physical' or 'psychological'. 'Physical objectives' are statements of physical intent, usually articulated as a series of physical tasks ("go along a corridor, knock at the door, take hold of and turn the doorknob, open the door, enter . . ."). [72] Psychological objectives are generally related to the emotional life of a character in relation to other characters, and are also found in series--to mask her embarrassment, to throw her father off balance, embarrass and move him, disarm him.[73] Whether the objectives are physical or psychological, Stanislavski

emphasizes that the chain of objectives must not be broken:

> When this happens, when the actor breaks the logical chain of physical and psychological objectives and replaces it with other things, he is crippling life. All moments in a role that are not filled out with creative objectives and feelings are a temptation to actors' cliches, theatrical conventionality. When violence to our spiritual and physical natures is present, when our emotions are in chaos, when we lack the logic and consecutiveness of objectives, we do not genuinely live a part.[74]

The careful selection of objectives is therefore one of the actor's most vital tasks:

> Every objective must be within the powers of an actor; otherwise it will not lead him on, indeed it will frighten him, paralyze his feelings, and instead of emerging itself it will send in its stead mere cliches, craft acting. How often we see this happen! As long as a creative objective maintains itself on the level of affective feelings, an actor will truly live his part. But as soon as he sets himself a complicated objective beyond the powers of his own creative nature, drawn from some lesser-known level of human emotions, his natural feeling of his part stops short; it is replaced by physical tension, false feeling, and cliche acting.
>
> The same thing occurs when an objective raises doubts, uncertainties, weakening or even destroying the striving of one's creative will. Doubt is the enemy of creativeness. It holds back the process of living one's part. Therefore the actor must watch over his objectives, keep them free of anything that distracts the will from the essence of creativeness or weakens the aspirations of the will.[75]

Thus, it is encumbent upon the actor to "find objectives that constantly move his feelings."[76]

Stanislavski suggests that physical objectives are preferable for the initial training of the actor. . . . "It is too early to become involved in psychology. For the time being, limit yourself to what is simple and physical. In every physical objective there is some psychology and vice versa."[77] As he becomes able, the actor will learn how to "compose a score of lively physical and psychologi-

cal objectives."[78]

Not all objectives, however, are within the actor's conscious power to select. Once the conscious objectives have been set, and begin to prompt the actor into an active experiencing of his role, other objectives, unconscious ones, come into being "intuitively"[79] and are "engendered by the emotion and will of the actors themselves."[80] Unconscious objectives may be either physical or psychological, and are of enormous value to the actor:

> The best[objective]is the unconscious one which immediately, emotionally takes possession of the actor's feelings, and carries him intuitively along to the basic goal of the play.[81]

In Stanislavski's view, then, unconscious objectives can often stimulate emotion directly, while conscious objectives prepare the actor for Stanislavski's next approach to spontaneity.

An important characteristic of the 'objective' is that it "automatically stirs the actor to physical action."[82] 'Physical actions' are Stanislavski's next means to achieving spontaneity.[83] If the objective provides the focus and direction for an actor, freeing him to act and react in the part, it is in the actor's moment to moment playing out of the objectives by means of the resultant 'physical actions' which provides him with a continuous and spontaneous experiencing of the role. Physical actions include not only the movements and gestures of the character, but the text as well, as, like the other actions, it is put to use in the carrying out of the objective:

> I have deprived you of the text for the time being, until the line of your role is fixed; I have saved up for you the author's magnificent words until such time as they will have better use, so that they will not be just rattled off but employed to carry out some fundamental objective.[84]

Stanislavski stresses the importance of physical actions to spontaneity:

> . . . the point of physical actions lies not in themselves as such but in what they evoke: conditions, proposed circumstances, feelings;[85]

and further,

> Let each actor give an honest reply to the question of what physical action he would undertake, how he would act (not feel, there should for heaven's sake be no question of feelings at this point) in the given circumstances created by the playwright, the director of the play, the scene designer, the actor himself by means of his own imagination, the lighting technician, and so forth. When these physical actions have been clearly defined, all that remains for the actor to do is to execute them. (Note that I say execute physical actions, not feel them, because if they are properly carried out the feelings will be generated spontaneously. If you work the other way around and begin by thinking about your feelings and trying to squeeze them out of yourself, the result will be distortion and force, your sense of experiencing your part will turn into theatrical, mechanical acting, and your movements will be distorted);[86]

and further,

> The spirit cannot but respond to the actions of the body, provided of course that these are genuine, have purpose, and are productive.[87]

One effective way of strengthening the bond between physical action and emotion is through repetition: ". . . the more often I repeat the scene the stronger the line of physical actions becomes, the more powerful the movement, the life, its truthfulness, and my faith in it";[88] and further, ". . . the more I relive the physical life the more definite and firm will the line of the spiritual life become."[89]

As with the objective, the key to making physical actions effective lies with the imagination, the sense of belief: "In the

generation of physical actions there must be a faith in their actuality, a sense of truth in them." Thus the process bears witness "to the intimate tie between physical action and all the inner 'elements' of a creative state."[90]

For Stanislavski, physical actions provide the easiest and most effective access to the emotional life of the actor in his role. He explains:

> . . . it is easier to lay hold of physical than psychological action, it is more accessible than elusive inner feelings. Also physical action is easier to fix, it is material, visible. Actually, there is no physical action which does not involve desires, aspirations, objectives, or feelings which justify the action; there is no act of imagination which does not contain some imagined action. . . . We are more at home in the area of physical actions. . . . We can better orient ourselves, we are more inventive, confident, than in the area of the inner "elements" which are so difficult to seize and hold.[91]

Physical action possesses, in Stanislavski's estimation, tremendous power to spontaneously affect the actor's inner being.

The fourth element in the acting process by which spontaneity may be achieved is "tempo-rhythm,"[92] the speed or pace at which the action moves and the number of 'beats' of action contained in each measure of the 'score' of objectives. Another way to describe 'tempo-rhythm' is to define tempo as the measure of syllables, words, speech, and movements in actions, and rhythm as the number of actions--words, syllables, movements--in each measure, and the way in which they are combined, sequenced, and emphasized within each measure. Tempo-rhythm establishes the quality of a given action, including spoken action, and determines the effect that the action will have upon the actor's emotional life:

> . . . tempo-rhythm of movement cannot only intuitively, directly, immediately suggest appropriate feelings and arouse the sense of experiencing what one is doing but also it helps stir one's creative faculty.[93]

Referring to tempo-rhythm of speech, Stanislavski states:

> . . . the correctly established tempo-rhythm of a play or a role can of itself, intuitively (on occasion automatically) take hold of the feelings of an actor and arouse in him a true sense of living his part.[94]

Stanislavski summarizes his approach to training the actor in tempo-rhythm:

> Do you remember how we clapped hands to stimulate a mood in which feelings would correspond to the rhythm? Do you remember how we clapped out anything that came to mind, a march, a train's noise, various conversations? This clapping evoked a mood and feelings, if not in the listeners, at least in the person who was doing it. Do you remember the various tempi suggested by the departure of a train and all the real excitement felt by the passenger? And how we amused ourselves by evoking all kinds of feelings with a make-believe metronome? . . . And do you recall acting to music?
>
> In all these sketches and exercises in action it was the tempo-rhythm in each case which created the mood and stimulated the corresponding emotional experiences.
>
> We made analogous experiments with words. You remember the influence on your feelings of the words recited in quarter notes, eighth notes, etc. . . . In all these exercises which I have enumerated there is one result which emerges, in greater or lesser degree. A state of inner experience, of inner sensation is created.[95]

Because it is such a powerful and effective tool for arousing both inner feelings and imagination, tempo-rhythm must be carefully handled:

> It can be as harmful as it is helpful. If we use it correctly it helps induce the right feelings in a natural unforced way. But there are incorrect rhythms as well which arouse the wrong feelings of which it is impossible to rid one's self without the use of the appropriate ones.[96]

For Stanislavski, then, these four elements--the 'creative state' (including the processes of relaxation, concentration, and imagination); 'objectives'; 'physical actions'; and 'tempo-rhythm' are the paths by which spontaneity may be achieved in the actor's art. It seems implicit in Stanislavski's methodology that, while all four elements are important, they need not necessarily be handled in sequence. The actor might choose to begin with any one of them as, through a process of repetition, the other elements gradually emerge on their own. What is important to Stanislavski is that, whatever sequencing or combining of approaches takes place, every point in the actor's training, rehearsal, and performance should be marked by the quality of spontaneity.

Summary

Stanislavski clearly establishes his view of the primacy of spontaneity in acting--of living, feeling, experiencing oneself in the part. The spontaneous actor, having overcome the obstacles of habit, poor training, or attitude, is characterized by an ability to turn his focus from the audience to the play, to be relaxed, alert, and able to respond instantly to the world of the play. Most important, he is able to believe in the circumstances of the character and the play. Thus, he is able to allow the physical elements of the play, coupled with his own imagination, to impel him into the emotional life of his character.

The methodology developed by Stanislavski is not a fixed

sequential system; it is primarily an elaboration of the many approaches to spontaneity which are open and available to the actor. It is Stanislavski's contention that the actor can be taught and trained to act spontaneously if he understands the basic principles which underlie his craft. Armed with this understanding, the actor may choose to work through whatever approach provides the key to experiencing his character. Stanislavski does imply that the greatest success will be achieved by those actors who systematically explore all the approaches in the process of learning to 'live their parts'.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Stanislavski, Constantin. An Actor Prepares. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1936. pp. 17-30

[2]Ibid. p.14

[3]Stanislavski, Constantin. Building a Character. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949. p. 272

[4]An Actor Prepares. p. 50

[5]Stanislavski, Constantin. Stanislavski's Legacy. E. R. Hapgood (ed.) New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968. p. 11

[6]Ibid. p. 12

[7]An Actor Prepares. p. 25

[8]Building a Character. pp. 265-72

[9]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 186 [10]Ibid. p. 12

[11]Ibid. p. 13 [12]Ibid. [13]Ibid. [14]Ibid. p. 6

[15]Ibid. p. 17 [16]Ibid. p. 28 [17]Ibid. p. 18

[18]Ibid. p. 28 [19]Ibid. [20]Ibid. p. 111

[21]Building a Character. p. 272

[22]Meyerhold, Vsevelod. "The 225th Studio." in Tulane Drama Review. Volume 9, Fall, 1964. pp. 22-3

[23]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 134

[24]An Actor Prepares. p. 13

[25]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 134

[26]Building a Character. p. 274

[27]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 11 [28]Ibid. pp. 184-5

[29]Building a Character. p. 274

[30]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 186

[31]St. Denis, M. "Stanislavski and Shakespeare." in Tulane Drama Review. Volume 9, Fall, 1964. pp. 77-84

[32]An Actor Prepares. p. 17 [33]Ibid. [34]Ibid. p. 34

[35]Ibid. p. 26 [36]Ibid. p. 25

[37]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 130

[38]An Actor Prepares. p. 22

[39]Building a Character. p. 280

[40]An Actor Prepares. p. 13 [41]Ibid. p. 18

[42]Building a Character. p. 280 [43]Ibid. p. 274

[44]Ibid. pp. 279-80

[45]An Actor Prepares. p. 37 [46]Ibid. pp. 20-1

[47]Ibid. p. 27 [48]Ibid. [49]Ibid. p. 29

[50]Building a Character. p. 266

[51]Stanislavski's Legacy. P. 11 [52]Ibid. p. 11

[53]An Actor Prepares. p. 15

[54]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 11

[55]An Actor Prepares. pp. 92-3 [56]Ibid. pp. 68-89

[57]Ibid. [58]Ibid. p. 82 [59]Ibid. p. 61 [60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid. pp. 56-7 [62]Ibid. p. 60

[63]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 187 [64]Ibid. p. 188

[65]Ibid. p. 189 [66]Ibid. p. 188

[67]An Actor Prepares. p. 53 [68]Ibid. p. 113

[69]Ibid. p. 37

[70]Stanislavski, Constantin. Creating a Role. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961. pp. 50-1

[71]Ibid. [72]Ibid. p. 54 [73]Ibid. [74]Ibid. p. 56

[75]Ibid. pp. 80-1 [76]Ibid. p. 63

[77]An Actor Prepares. p. 114 [78]Ibid. p. 80

[79]Creating a Role. p. 52 [80]Ibid.

[81]An Actor Prepares. p. 52 [82]Ibid. p. 62

[83]Stanislavski's Legacy. pp. 46-7

[84]Creating a Role. pp. 140-1

[85]Creating a Role. p. 208 [86]Ibid. p. 201

[87]Ibid. p. 149 [88]Ibid. p. 225 [89]Ibid. pp. 227-8

[90]Stanislavski's Legacy. p. 47 [91]Ibid.

[92]Building a Character. pp. 177-237 [93]Ibid. p. 196

[94]Ibid. p. 236 [95]Ibid. p. 235 [96]Ibid. p. 186

CHAPTER THREE

RICHARD BOLESLAVSKY

Richard Boleslavsky was less a theoretrician than a teacher, and he devoted his career to making Stanislavski's methods more accessible by developing his own teaching methodologies for the concepts introduced by Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre. In the process, he introduced new techniques and new definitions into the expanding vocabulary of acting theory and practice. Some of these terms require a degree of interpretation in relation to Stanislavski's original work, as they reflect Boleslavsky's more intensive coverage of ground from which Stanislavski had already moved away. Also, though Boleslavsky is primarily a methodologist, and though his statements regarding the theoretical principles of acting are expansions on the principles identified by Stanislavski, his articulation of methodology and terminology often bears a religious or "spiritual"[1] tone which clouds the objective "laws"[2] so critical to Stanislavski's approach.

Theory

Boleslavsky begins on the same theoretical footing as his predecessor, with the identification of the particular acting process known as 'living one's part':

> "Living one's part" means complete spiritual and physical self-abandon for a definite period of time, in order to fulfill a real or fantastical problem of the theatre.[3]

In this state of 'complete physical and spiritual self-abandon' the actor does not self-consciously present something to the audience. Instead, with his focus upon the play's 'problem' rather than upon himself, he experiences the life of the play as it happens; he becomes spontaneous. The spontaneous actor (called the 'creative actor' by Boleslavsky) is thus the actor who "lives his part."[4] The 'creative actor' is contrasted to the "actor-imitator," who simply "imitates different human emotions without feeling them."[5] This latter type is also labelled by Boleslavsky as "mechanical":

> The difference between them is the same as between a human being and a mechanical puppet, or as between an artist's painting and a photograph. No matter how fine a photograph may be, it could never be a work of art. It is nothing but a copy, a mechanical repetition of life, a stamp--while a painting is unique, being an individually created bit of "better" life.[6]

Like Stanislavski, Boleslavsky focuses upon the actor's own awareness and understanding of the presence or absence of spontaneity in his acting. He outlines the characteristics of the 'creative actor': he is "sensitive and responsive to his surroundings"; he "does not try to invent new feelings"; he is not concerned with "the external effects of his part"; he is not preoccupied with elements beyond the "definite problem" of his character, such as "the public, applause, the costumes, the sets, a girlfriend in the box, and so forth." He allows his own feelings to emerge "in different forms prompted by his imagination"; he is concerned with "the internal, spiritual side" of his part, and is able "to find life's truth in all circumstances and situations."[7] This last element Boleslavsky illustrates with an

example which points to his 'finding life's truth' as being similar to Stanislavski's 'magic if': an ability to believe in the imaginary circumstances of the character and the play, coupled with a willingness to respond to them as if they were real:

> On the opening night the property man forgot to put the earrings in the drawer. The actress playing the mother did not lose her presence of mind and, holding the imaginary earrings, started to describe them so eloquently that the audience actually believed it was seeing them. After the show a couple of people asked Stanislavski where in the world he had acquired such a remarkable set of earrings.[8]

While the reference is to the audience, Boleslavsky's point is that the successful creation of an imaginary world for the audience is dependent upon the actor's ability to believe it himself.

The creative actor possesses a quality of acting wherein "the stronger the emotion, the more freedom in the voice, the more relaxation in muscles."[9] He is also able to distinguish between his emotional life on the stage, and real life: "It doesn't matter how deep emotion is in acting, with the return to life it snaps off and is laid aside with no perturbance."[10] By this last characteristic, it is evident that Boleslavsky's spontaneous acting process is not simply an uncontrolled carrying over of the actor's personal emotional life into that of the character.

Thus, for Boleslavsky, the 'creative actor' is not self-conscious but is possessed of a special kind of concentration, sensitivity, and imagination; he is free from the need to impose artificial feelings onto his part, but allows his own emotions to emerge in whatever form the stage life permits.

For Boleslavsky, the importance of spontaneity in the theatre is both primary and unquestioned. It is the foundation for his theory and, for him, defines and marks the difference between what is theatre and what is not:

> The conflict of actions may be presented on the stage and remain there petrified awaiting an answer to the question: "What is the theme of the play?" In which case it is not theatre. But the same conflict may be created with unexpected spontaneity, with uncalculated impulse and it will plunge the audience into a feverish state of partisanship toward one side or another. It will force them to find their own living and excited answer. This will be theatre.[11]

Boleslavsky maintains that spontaneity is a requirement of the play itself: "After all, that is what the author wants from you. Spontaneous answers to his cues."[12] His attitude toward the importance of spontaneity is summarized in his response to the naive 'Creature', upon witnessing her unhappy reaction to his criticism of her pretentious attempt at King Lear:

> You suffered just now; you felt deeply. Those are two things without which you cannot do in any art and especially the art of the theatre.[13]

For Boleslavsky, it is this deep feeling on the part of the actor which makes the theatre meaningful and significant.

Boleslavsky's theoretical view, then, is that spontaneity exists in the concept of 'living one's part', and can be recognized by the characteristics of lack of self-consciousness and deep concentration, and through the presence of true emotion rising in the actor. To Boleslavsky, the quality of spontaneity in acting is essential to the art of the theatre.

Methodology

As with the many other directors, actors, and teachers born of the Moscow Art Theatre and its related activities in the early part of this century, Richard Boleslavsky's methodology is based upon a primary assumption that the actor can be taught the means of achieving the quality of spontaneity in acting, of 'living one's part': ". . . inspiration and spontaneity are the results of calculation and practice."[14]

Boleslavsky presents six elements or 'lessons' in the process of learning to live one's part: 'Spiritual Concentration'; 'affective memory'; 'dramatic action'; 'characterization'; 'observation'; and 'Rhythm'. Two of the six lessons, characterization and observation, deal with the enhancement of the acting process, in broadening and deepening the range of parts open to an actor; unlike the other four, they do not directly or indirectly determine the presence or absence of spontaneity. Spiritual Concentration, affective memory, dramatic action, and Rhythm, however, are all necessary methods for achieving spontaneity in acting. For Boleslavsky, spontaneity can be achieved within each of these four 'lessons'. Interestingly, with the exception of 'action' and 'Rhythm', Boleslavsky does not discuss in his Six Lessons the means for moving from one lesson to the next, notwithstanding his emphasis upon the importance to the actor's development of following the sequence laid out in his text. Each of the four lessons concerned with spontaneity possesses its own means for achieving that quality, and the actor will need to approach these methods one by one, in the proper order, incorporating the different means to

spontaneity as they are presented by Boleslavsky: "This development must be done gradually in a definite and logical sequence."[15]

Like the other theoretricians discussed, Boleslavsky's methodology addresses the obstacles or resistances to spontaneity which are present in the actor. Such resistances may be physical, social, or psychological, and must be overcome at the outset of the actor's training, through exercises in what Boleslavsky terms 'Spiritual Concentration'. Spiritual Concentration is the actor's ability "to say to any of your feelings: Stop--and fill my entire being!"[16] Through Spiritual Concentration, the actor gains access to a range of experiences and emotions and sets the conditions for establishing the truth and clarity of the imaginary world of the play, much as Stanislavski's 'creative state' provides the foundation for the 'magic if'.

The first of the three resistances to be overcome through Spiritual Concentration is physical resistance within the actor's own body. Here, the Spiritual Concentration exercises stress physical relaxation:

> The only thing you have to do is to think of them constantly, to relax them as soon as you feel any tension, and to develop them by using some specially devised daily exercises. You must watch yourself all day long, at whatever you do, and be able to relax each superfluous tension of your muscles, letting only those of them which are indispensable to the performance of a certain physical problem. . . .[17]

These 'specially devised exercises' include:

1. The concentration of your thoughts on each separate group of your muscles, bringing them from the state of tension into one of relaxation

2. The verifying of your muscles in the sense of supplying them only with the necessary amount of strength during the performance of the following exercises: walking, sitting down, the lifting up of different articles from the floor, taking down of same from a high shelf, pointing at different things, calling, greeting, lighting a cigarette, the handing of a burning match to someone while a third person tries to blow it out, kicking with your foot articles of a different weight, lacing a shoe, any physical exercise, followed by complete rest, the taking of an intricate position followed by an immediate relaxation of all the muscles with its natural result--the fall of the body, the giving of a blow, the defense from a real or imaginary blow.[18]

This relaxation allows the actor to concentrate his attention and energy upon the world of the play.

The second group of obstacles to be overcome in Spiritual Concentration are the social resistances, the habits of perception and behavior which have been ingrained into the actor by the demands of living in society, the "constant struggle for our existence that subordinates us to those on whom our livelihood depends."[19] These must be overcome by the cultivation of an inner spiritual strength and endurance, through meditation and contemplation: "No one expects you to retire from life and be sinless, but it is important to be conscious of your own shortcomings and to be able to combat them."[20] Examples of these exercises include meditation:

> Only by a boundless faith in our vocation, and the continual support of our spirit through close communion with the geniuses of humanity who suffered for the triumph of

> their ideals. Think of Cervantes . . . of the destitute youth of Dickens; of Savanarola burned at the stake; of Mayor McSweeney of Cork, and hundreds of others whose examples teach us the conquest of life;[21]

and appreciation of nature:

> Cast your eyes at a piece of blue sky among the sky-scrapers of Broadway and you'll understand where the truth lies. Lend your ear to the beat of the surf and you will understand where the real key is for the appreciation of music. Look at a rushing mountain brook or at a falling star and you'll understand the meaning of speed.[22]

The third "opposition in the struggle" toward Spiritual Concentration, identified as the "most serious one," is psychological: ". . . our own passions, emotions, and desires."[23] These may take the form of "ambitions," a "craving for priority," or a preoccupation with the "petty things in life . . . a new hat, a drink of whiskey, flirtation, etc."[24] Boleslavsky prescribes a number of sensory, memory, meditational, and imagination exercises. One such exercise involves 'mood': ". . . as you walk or while you do some physical exercises, keep different moods, beginning with the simplest ones and increasing them gradually up to the most complicated rhythms of your inner being."[25] Through "long and painstaking practice,"[26] the actor can overcome his physical, social, and psychological resistances and achieve the state of Spiritual Concentration. He will have acquired the first of the avenues to his subconscious by which spontaneity is generated in his acting. Through Spiritual Concentration, the actor is enabled to keep his focus off the audience, off himself, and on the world of the play. As Boleslavsky states in this 'first lesson': "It is the actor's own fault if he allows the public to interfere with his creation."[27] Mastering this first step

is, to Boleslavsky, "the main problem of a creative school of acting."[28]

After Spiritual Concentration, the second step on the road to spontaneity, to 'self-abandonment' on the part of the actor, is his training in the technique of 'memory-of-emotion' or "affective memory."[29] Affective memory is the process by which the actor spontaneously brings emotional truthfulness to his part. Using his heightened powers of concentration, he calls up memories which produce emotional responses similar to those of the character. These exercises were initiated, then largely de-emphasized by Stanislavski, but for both him and Boleslavsky it was important to approach the exercises in affective memory from the imagination, not by trying to reproduce a certain feeling directly--"his only concern should be to find it, to sense it with his entire being, to get used to it, and to let nature itself find forms for its expression." Then, ". . . aroused to the heights of exaltation, in full possession of all the shadings of his new feeling, the actor begins to pronounce in the solitude of his work-room the immortal words of the author. . . ." Through repetition, the words and emotions come more easily and the speaking of the words eventually arouses the emotions of the actor directly. Thus, repetition is a key factor in inducing spontaneity in the actor's work in affective memory.[31] The result of this work will be that the actor "never reads or repeats his role--he actually lives it. . . ."[32]

The third and fourth steps in Boleslavsky's approach for inducing spontaneity are 'dramatic action' and 'Rhythm'. 'Dramatic

action' is that "which the writer expresses in words, having that action as the purpose and goal of his words, and which the actor performs, or acts."[33] Action is determined through analysis and interpretation of the text, and is largely the responsibility of the director:[34]

> [the play is produced] through interpretation of the play, and through ingenious combinations of smaller, secondary, or complementary actions that will secure that interpretation.[35]

Boleslavsky indicates that there are three aspects to dramatic action--will, action, and expression. 'Will' corresponds to Stanislavski's 'objective', where the character's overall desire in the scene is established. 'Action' is "defined in a verb," and is the means by which the will is played out or worked toward. 'Expression' is the "actual doing," the manner or quality of the action; how it is rendered.[36] This latter aspect, the 'How', Boleslavsky calls 'Rhythm'. Boleslavsky does not appear to share Stanislavski's view that actions can or should rise spontaneously from focusing on the objective; he is more concerned that director and actor work together to consciously select and establish actions to underscore the text:

> . . . you could take a pencil and write "music of action" under every word or speech, as you write music to lyrics for a song; then on the stage you would play that "music of action." You would have to memorize your actions as you memorize the music. You would have to know distinctly the difference between "I complained" and "I scorned" and, although the two actions follow each other, you would be just as different in their delivery as the singer is when he takes "C" or "C flat."[37]

He also notes that actions should be memorized "after you have found the feeling through your 'memory of affects'."[38] He appears, too,

to discount the importance of building up emotional momentum for a scene:

> . . . when you know action by heart no interruption or change of order can disturb you. If you have your action confined within one single word, and you know exactly what that action is, you have it inside of you on the call of a split second, how can you be disturbed when the time comes for its delivery . . . you can start anywhere, any time, and go as far as you wish. . . .[39]

For Boleslavsky, then, action, like text, is a fixed element in the acting process.

'Rhythm' is the manner in which actions are carried out on the stage. "What" happens is important to understanding the objective, or "theme" of the play, but "How" it happens is what will impact most upon the audience:

> In the theatre I call it "Mr. What"--rather a deadly personality without his mate, "How." It is only when "How" appears on the stage that things begin to happen . . . and the secret is not in the question: "What is the theme of the play?" but in the statement: "This is how the theme perseveres or does not persevere through all obstacles"[40]

The result in performance is "unexpected spontaneity and uncalculated impulse."[41] The actor, in concert with the playwright, selects or creates the rhythms for his role from his memory of rhythms accumulated from studying his own movements, speech patterns, and emotions, from becoming aware of the rhythms around him, in other people, in cities and towns, and in nature. Then, when interpreting the words and actions through the created Rhythm, the actor must "let the meaning and Rhythm of your words be a continuation of their eternal sound. Inhale their spirit and feel at one with them, even for an instant,"[42] The implication in Boleslavsky's methodology is that action on the

stage does not occur apart from its Rhythm, and that the actor's engagement in both the 'what' and the 'how' allows him to achieve spontaneity.

These four elements, then, make up the means by which Boleslavsky achieves the sense of life and truth on the stage, the 'self-abandonment' of the actor in his role: Spiritual Concentration, affective memory, dramatic action, and Rhythm. Boleslavsky intends these elements to be dealt with sequentially, as each plays a vital part in the achievement of spontaneity. It also appears that Boleslavsky, unlike Stanislavski, is less concerned with spontaneity in the rehearsal process, than in performance. Thus, the four steps in his methodology, while important in directly generating spontaneity on their own, are more significant in that they set the process in motion by which the actor is eventually enabled to totally 'live his part'.

Summary

In his theory and methodology, Richard Boleslavsky identifies the concept of spontaneity, which he refers to as a process of 'living one's part'. The process is characterized by an ability to concentrate fully on the world of the play free from pretense, distraction, self-consciousness and artifice, and by an ability to enter fully into the emotional life of the character. Boleslavsky considers this process the essence of the actor's art.

Boleslavsky's methodology of spontaneity, while not as clearly articulated or as extensive as Stanislavski's, is none the less

grounded in the same fundamental principles. Boleslavsky, however, emphasizes the importance of approaching the various means to spontaneity in the proper sequence, so that, by mastering the techniques of Spiritual Concentration, then affective memory, and finally action and Rhythm, the actor is able to make spontaneity a consistent quality in his acting.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Boleslavsky, Richard. "Living One's Part." in Actors on Acting. T. Cole and H. Chinoy (eds.) New York: Crown Publishers, 1975. p. 511

[2]Stanislavski, Constantin. Stanislavski's Legacy. E. R. Hapgood (ed.) New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968. p. 170

[3]Actors on Acting. p. 512 [4]Ibid. p. 511 [5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid. [7]Ibid. p. 512 [8]Ibid.

[9]Boleslavsky, Richard. Acting: the first six lessons. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1939. p. 77

[10]Ibid. p. 8 [11]Ibid. p. 118 [12]Ibid. p. 128

[13]Ibid. p. 21 [14]Ibid. p. 119

[15]Actors on Acting. p. 511 [16]Ibid. p. 512

[17]Ibid. p. 513 [18]Ibid. [19]Ibid. p. 514 [20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid. [22]Ibid. [23]Ibid. [24]Ibid. [25]Ibid. p. 515

[26]Ibid. p. 516

[27]Six Lessons. p. 26

[28]Actors on Acting. p. 516 [29]Ibid. pp. 516-7

[30]Ibid. p. 517

[31]Six Lessons. p. 67

[32]Actors on Acting. p. 517

[33]Six Lessons. p. 61 [34]Ibid. p. 62 [35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid. p. 66 [37]Ibid. [38]Ibid. p. 69 [39]Ibid. p. 67

[40]Ibid. pp. 118-9 [41]Ibid. [42]Ibid. p. 134

CHAPTER FOUR

MICHAEL CHEKHOV

Michael Chekhov, like his contemporary, Richard Boleslavsky, is primarily a methodologist. In his writings he emphasizes what it is that the actor should do (or not do) and how it ought to be done. He places a lesser emphasis on articulating the fundamental principles of the acting process. Still, the nature of Chekhov's acting theory, and more specifically, his views regarding spontaneity, can be inferred through an examination of the way in which the theory finds application. A clear statement of this application is to be found in Chekhov's widely read and utilized textbook of acting, To The Actor.

Theory

In Chekhov's theory, the essence of spontaneity is the experiencing by the actor of "real artistic feelings and emotions . . . real creative excitement on the stage."[1] His concept can be most readily perceived in his descriptions of the "improvising actor":[2]

> . . . every role offers an actor the opportunity to improvise, to collaborate and truly co-create with the author and director. This suggestion, of course, does not imply improvising new lines or substituting business for that outlined by the director. On the contrary. The given lines and the business are the firm bases upon which the actor must and can develop his improvisations. How he speaks the lines and how he fulfills the business are

> the open gates to a vast field of improvisation. The "hows" of his lines and business are the ways in which he can express himself freely.[3]

What is critical to Chekhov's concept of 'improvisation' is that the actor does not logically or analytically decide upon the 'hows'. He discovers them:

> Let each successive moment of your improvisation be a psychological (not logical!) result of the moment preceding it. Thus, without any previously thought-out theme, you will move from the starting to the concluding moment, improvising all the way. By doing so you will go through the whole gamut of different sensations, emotions, moods, desires, inner impulses and business, all of which will be found by you spontaneously, on the spot, as it were. . . . Your subconscious will suggest things which cannot be foreseen by anybody, not even by yourself, if you will but yield freely and completely to the inspiration of your own improvising spirit.[4]

This spontaneity or 'inspiration' or 'improvising spirit' is to be found not only in non-scripted exercises and scenes, but in every scripted play, every rehearsal, and every performance in which the 'improvising actor' takes part, as spontaneity to Chekhov means to "follow the psychological succession of inner events (feelings, emotions, wishes, and other impulses)."[5] It should be noted that, while 'improvisation' is also the term given by Chekhov to describe one kind of acting exercise, the particular quality achieved by the actor in that exercise, the "spirit of the improvising actor,"[6] is the quality of spontaneity. It is thus appropriate to utilize the word 'improvisation' in expressing Chekhov's broader meaning of 'with inspiration' or 'spontaneously'; thus, to 'act improvisationally' is also to 'act spontaneously' or to 'act with inspiration'.

In addition to the terms already mentioned, Chekhov also develops a terminology for spontaneity in acting through contrasting

it with non-spontaneous acting forms. These other forms include those in which actors "pretend that they are feeling on the stage," or "squeeze . . . feelings out of themselves."[7] These styles of acting Chekhov calls "untrue" or "unnatural."[8] In other cases the actor plays "just himself" or employs "cliches,"[9] "theatrical habits,"[10] and "mannerisms."[11] In contrast, the spontaneous actor "will not glide over the surfaces of the characters he plays nor impose upon them his personal and unvarying mannerisms."[12] He employs "intuition"[13] and experiences "inspiration,"[14] and his feelings are "genuine, artistic, and true."[15] Neither is he a "bookish" or "rote" actor,[16] but one whose process enables him to "fulfill the desires [of the character] truthfully" and to "experience its feelings sincerely on the stage."[17]

The characteristics of spontaneity (or lack of spontaneity) described by Chekhov are identifiable primarily within the actor himself. Chekhov also implies that an audience will be perceptive to some of these characteristics, if not consciously, then within the effect upon the spectator of experiencing the actor in his part.

The principal characteristics of spontaneity within the actor are the sensations he experiences, sensations of 'ease', 'beauty', 'form', 'entirety', and 'presence'. The sense of 'ease' experienced by the spontaneous actor is a feeling of "lightness" and "grace."[18] It is a relaxation of body and spirit.[19] Chekhov is less clear about the sense of 'form', but it appears to be an experience of absolute clarity and specificity in one's portrayal of the words and actions of the character.[20] Regarding the sense of 'beauty', Chekhov states

that it must be experienced by the actor "not analytically or vicariously but, rather, instantly and intuitively."[21] This sense might be better understood by comparing the feeling presented by Chekhov to one's other experiences of beauty, involving a feeling of appreciation for the thing being perceived. For Chekhov, "true beauty has its roots inside the human being, whereas false beauty is only on the outside . . . 'showing off' is the negative side of beauty."[22] The sense of 'entirety' is one in which the actor will "intuitively stress essentials in[his] character and follow the main line of events, thus holding firmly the attention of the audience."[23] The actor who lacks spontaneity may well manifest a lack of this sense, and his performance will thus be rendered "inharmonious and incomprehensible to the spectator."[24] The spontaneous actor by contrast is able to see all the details of his character, as though viewing it in perspective "from some elevation."[25] With a sense of 'entirety' the actor will find that his acting "becomes more powerful."[26] The final characteristic of spontaneity described by Chekhov is the actor's sense of 'presence' on stage. A strong feeling of 'presence' means that the actor "is not self-conscious, nor does he suffer from any kind of fear or lack of confidence."[27] Rather, he experiences a feeling of "freedom and increased life,"[28] a "new and gratifying sensation of complete confidence in yourself, along with the sensation of freedom and inner richness"[29] in which "his body can consume--and respond to--all kinds of purely psychological values."[30]

Besides lacking the above senses, the non-spontaneous actor, and his audience, may find that:

> . . . his [the actor's] body becomes less and less animated, more and more shallow, dense, puppet-like, and in extreme cases even resembles some kind of automation of his mechanistic age . . . the actor begins to resort to all sorts of theatrical tricks and cliches and soon accumulates a number of peculiar acting habits and bodily mannerisms.[31]

The unspontaneous actor will be either "arbitrary or indecisive," determining in advance or guessing what his character's actions and responses should be, or "floundering aimlessly and endlessly."[32] In non-scripted exercises and scenes he will rely on a great deal of "verbalization," will use "too many words," and "monopolize the dialogue."[33]

These are the internal and external signs that mark the spontaneous and the non-spontaneous actor. The actor's own internal experience of spontaneity is more clearly enunciated by Chekhov than is its manifestation to the audience; even so, it is Chekhov's view that the spontaneous actor can profoundly affect the audience, whether they are consciously aware of his spontaneity or not, as he is able to empower them to become "an active co-creator of the performance," rather than a passive observer or superficial participant.[34]

For Michael Chekhov, spontaneity is a necessary quality of acting. It is important for the actor in his development as a creative artist, and for the quality of experience he is able to provide to the audience. Chekhov's approach to acting theory is based upon a key principle which one might call the essential principle of spontaneity:

> It is a known fact that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay.[35]

It is the spontaneous or 'inspirational' nature of this physical-

psychological 'interplay', beyond the normal control of the actor's conscious analytic processes, which forms the foundation of Chekhov's acting theory:

> The chief aim of my explorations was to find those conditions which could best and invariably call forth that elusive will-o'-the-wisp known as inspiration.[36]

Chekhov's appreciation of the importance of spontaneity can also be inferred from his frequent references to the necessity for the actor to experience a sense of 'freedom'.[37] The original meaning of the Greek root word from which the term 'spontaneity' is derived takes on some significance, as Chekhov's implication is that the actor will only realize his fullest potential as a creative artist if his entire being--thoughts, emotions, and will--can be set free from the conscious control of the analytical processes of his mind:

> . . . his [the actor's] compelling desire and highest aim . . . can be achieved only by means of free improvisation;[38]

as:

> . . . his real mission, his joyous instinct, [is] to convey to the spectator, as a kind of revelation, his very own impressions of things as he sees and feels them. . . . Yet how can he do that if his body is chained and limited in its expressiveness by the force of unartistic, uncreative influences?[39]

Chekhov challenges the 'mannered' and the 'cliche' actors:

> . . . you may change your mind upon seeing and experiencing how much penetration you develop while working upon your parts; how interesting and intricate your characters will appear to you, whereas they seemed so ordinary, flat and obvious before; how many new, human and unexpected psychological features they will reveal to you, and how, as a consequence, your acting will become less and less monotonous;[40]

and further:

> . . . you will be astonished at how limitless your artistic abilities can be, and what great use you can make, even unconsciously, of these new capacities of your talent.[41]

The impact of spontaneity will not be lost upon the audience, either, as the actor's experiencing of his character's inner life will always prompt him to "new, more original, more correct and more suitable means of outer expressiveness on the stage."[42] The spontaneous or 'inspired' actor finds his "creative individuality," his "artistic I," set free, with profound effects for his relationship to the audience:[43]

> . . . in moments of inspiration the I of an artist undergoes a kind of metamorphosis. . . . If you have ever known such moments, you will recall that, with the appearance of this new I, you felt first of all an influx of power never experienced in your routine life. This power permeated your whole being, radiated from you into your surroundings, filling the stage and flowing over the footlights into the audience. It united you with the spectator and conveyed to him all your creative intentions, thoughts, images and feelings.[44]

The implication is clearly that the non-spontaneous actor is unable to offer to his audience the same quality or intensity of experience.

According to Chekhov's theory, then, spontaneity is the quality of acting wherein an actor experiences his role, discovering rather than deciding the emotional reality of the character. It is a deeply psychological process. Spontaneity is characterized by certain sensations which are experienced by the actor, most importantly a sense of freedom and confidence on the stage. The audience, too, is a beneficiary of spontaneity, as their own perception and experiencing of the play is enhanced by the presence of this quality in the actors' work.

In Chekhov's view, the element of spontaneity, of 'free improvisation', is the distinguishing element of an acting theory which he believes to be the foundation of the theatre:

> Dramatic art is nothing more than a constant improvisation. . . . There are no moments on the stage when an actor can be deprived of his right to improvise.[45]

Methodology

In To The Actor, Michael Chekhov offers an extensive methodology aimed at the achievement of spontaneity in acting. He does not delineate a single path by which spontaneity may be achieved, but presents a number of different approaches for an actor to take. He also emphasizes that the actor may not find it necessary to explore all the various avenues to spontaneity and indicates that the actor may find a single approach which works best for a particular character or scene.[46] As with the other methodologists discussed in this thesis, Chekhov recognizes the dualistic nature of any approach to spontaneity: the achievement of spontaneity and the overcoming of obstacles to spontaneity. His approaches emphasize the former perspective. Like the other methodologists, however, he first discusses the nature of the obstacles which prevent the actor from achieving spontaneity.

In Chekhov's view, the obstacles to spontaneity are psychological, and include "cold, analytical thinking"[47] and "dry reasoning,"[48] both of which "kill the imagination"[49] as "the more you probe with your analytical mind, the more silent become your feelings, the weaker your will and the poorer your chances for inspiration."[50] Another obstacle is "materialism," a preoccupation with creating an

acceptable product for the audience.[51] Chekhov describes a number of other kinds of "psychological garbage":

> These numerous negative obstacles would include a suppressed inferiority complex or megalomania, selfish and egotistical desires unconsciously intermingled with artistic aims, fear of making mistakes, unrecognized fear of the audience (and often even a hatred of it), nervousness, concealed jealousy or envy, bad and seemingly forgotten examples, and an unrestrained habit of finding fault with others.[52]

These are the kinds of subconscious feelings, thoughts, and desires which are liable to accumulate in the actor's subconscious and which can lead, so far as spontaneity is concerned, to "his own destruction."[53]

Chekhov presents a number of approaches which are designed to free the actor "from the influences that hamper, occlude and frequently destroy"[54] his work, to help him in achieving spontaneity. The approaches include: 'imagination', 'improvisation', 'atmosphere', 'sensations', 'Psychological Gestures', 'character and characterization', and 'objectives'. All of these approaches stress the importance of, and are based upon, the direct interplay between the actor's physical body and his psychological processes--thoughts, emotions, desires. The actor's sensitivity to, and development of, this interplay is both a first step and a continuing process if he is concerned with the achievement of spontaneity, as "only an indisputable command of his body and psychology will give him the necessary self-confidence, freedom, and harmony for his creative activity."[55] While the various approaches are dealt with sequentially by Chekhov, it should be re-emphasized that the actor, once he is aware of the different routes to spontaneity, may employ them in any sequence or combination he chooses, or may focus on only one or two.

The first approach to spontaneity discussed by Chekhov is '<u>imagination</u>'. In his 'imagination' exercises, Chekhov proposes that the actor select or allow certain images or sequences of images to appear in his imagination. Then, the actor observes and guides the images in a constant process of transformation, until particular images cause emotions to be aroused:

> The image changes under your questioning gaze, transforms itself again and again until gradually (or suddenly) you will find your emotions aroused. . . .[56]

He illustrates one such exercise:

> . . . create a character entirely by yourself. Start developing it, elaborating it in detail; work upon it through many days or perhaps weeks by asking questions and getting visible answers. Put it in different situations, different environments, and watch its reactions; develop its characteristic features and peculiarities. Then ask it to speak, and follow its emotions, desires, feelings, thoughts; open yourself to it so that its inner life will influence your own inner life. . . . Working that way, the time may come at any moment when your image will become so powerful that you will be unable to resist the desire to <u>incorporate</u> it, to act it even if it is only a bit of a short scene. When such a desire flares up in you, do not resist it, but act <u>freely</u> for as long as you wish.[57]

An extension of these exercises is the 'incorporation' exercise, which "will gradually establish those fine connections so necessary to the linking of your vivid imagination with your body, voice, and psychology."[58] In this exercise, a character is selected from literature and a few of its simple movements or phrases are imagined. Then, "in your imagination study the character with utmost attention to as many details as possible, until the feelings of the character arouse your own feeling."[59] At this point the actor must 'incorporate'--imitate or 'fulfill' the words and/or actions as faithfully as he can.[60] The actor is advised

not to try to incorporate too many images at one time, as this may cause "a strangling shock that forces you to abandon imaginative efforts and relapse into cliches and old worn-out theatrical habits."[61] The end result of the imagination/incorporation exercises is the spontaneous involvement of the actor's inner processes of thought, desire, and emotion:

> For in the process of incorporating strong, well-elaborated images you mold your body from within, as it were, and permeate it throughout with artistic feelings, emotions and will impulses.[62]

The second approach to spontaneity is via '<u>improvisation</u>'. By improvisation, Chekhov does not mean the changing or adding of lines to a script, nor the changing or adding of stage directions and 'business' different from that laid down by the director. Rather, he is referring to the way in which the lines and action are carried out, as "<u>How</u> he speaks the lines and <u>how</u> he fulfills the business are the open gates to a vast field of improvisation."[63] Chekhov presents this example of an improvisational exercise:

> First decide which are the starting and concluding moments of your improvisation. They must be definite pieces of action. The more contrasted the starting and concluding moments, the better.
>
> Do not try to anticipate what you are going to do <u>between</u> the two chosen moments. Do not try to find any logical justification or motivation for either the starting and concluding moments themselves. Choose them at random. Choose any two things that first pop into your head, and not because they will suggest or bracket a good improvisation. . . . Do not try to define the theme or plot. Define only the mood or feelings of that beginning and end. Then give yourself over to whatever momentary suggestions occur to you by pure intuition. Thus, when you get up and say, "Yes"--if that is your beginning--you will freely and with full confidence in yourself begin to "act," mainly following your feelings, emotions and moods.[64]

Eventually, and gradually, all the in-between points of action, or 'necessities' can be set down, until finally an entire sequence of words and actions is established. According to Chekhov, it is the presence of these 'necessities' which allows "real and true freedom in improvising."[65] The process of moving from necessity to necessity will, of itself, generate spontaneity in the way in which the actions (necessities) are carried out, and a "psychological succession of inner events (feelings, emotions, wishes, and other impulses)" will emerge from the actor's subconscious.[66] Thus, spontaneity or 'improvisation' always exists within the bounds of the necessities, the elements of the play which are established by the playwright and, later, by the director:

> When rehearsing a play you naturally encounter a great number of "necessities" which demand your facile improvisational activity and ability. The plot, lines, tempo, the author's and director's suggestions, the acting of the others in the cast--all determine the necessities and the varying lengths between them to which you must accommodate yourself.[67]

The next approach to spontaneity described by Chekhov is 'atmosphere'. Chekhov does not define the word 'atmosphere' directly, but rather through examples such as atmospheres of catastrophe, panic, hatred, exultation, heroism, calmness, peacefulness, tranquillity, silent mystery, depression, grief, coziness, charm, and love.[68] From these and other illustrations, it appears that, to Chekhov, 'atmosphere' is a combination of the actor's imaginative interpretation of stage events (for example, the expressions on the faces of other actors)[69] coupled with a direct experiencing of real or imagined background sensations and rhythms, such as a "calm, moonlit night."[70] These real and imaginary sensations possess the power to "stir and

awaken"[71] the actor's feelings, to "inspire"[72] him. For Chekhov, then, the power of atmosphere in helping the actor to achieve spontaneity is significant, as it will inevitably "support and arouse in you new feelings and fresh creative impulses."[73] Like Boleslavsky in his lesson on 'Rhythm', Chekhov recommends that the actor first observe and experience the different atmospheres (for Boleslavsky, 'Rhythms') of the life around him. He then imagines events and circumstances with their corresponding atmospheres. Finally, he creates atmospheres without imagining any occurrence or circumstance at all and then acts within them. Chekhov explains:

> Don't be impatient to "perform" or "act" the atmosphere with your movement. Don't deceive yourself; have confidence in the power of the atmosphere and imagine and woo it long enough (it will not be long at all!), and then move your arm and hand <u>within</u> it. Another possible mistake you may make is trying to <u>force yourself to feel</u> the atmosphere. Try to avoid such an effort. You <u>will</u> feel it around and within you as soon as you concentrate your attention on it properly. It will stir your feelings by itself, without any unnecessary and disturbing violence on your part. It will happen to you exactly the way it happens in life: when you encounter the atmosphere of a street disaster, you can't help <u>feeling</u> it.[74]

The actor then proceeds "to more complicated movements."[75] An extension to this exercise is to imagine the play as a "score" of atmospheres, and to move through the 'score', seeing how words and actions are affected.[76] In all cases, in exercises, rehearsal, and performance, the sense of atmosphere results from the actor's experiencing of real or imaginary sensations which occur (or are projected by his imagination) outside the actor himself, stimulating and evoking his feelings from without.

Chekhov's next approach is based upon the actor's experiencing of real or imaginary sensations, not from outside himself, but from

within. He calls the technique simply 'Sensations'. Its purpose is to bring about the spontaneous generation of "individual feelings" in the actor through the direct activity of his own body.[77] A 'Sensation' is the "nuance" or "quality" of a given physical action.[78] It is "the vessel into which your genuine artistic feelings pour easily and by themselves."[79] The actor makes a movement or series of movements with a certain quality, thus creating a particular Sensation which arouses the feelings of the actor.[80] Chekhov illustrates:

> Lift your arm. Lower it. What have you done? You have fulfilled a simple physical action. You have made a gesture. And you have made it without any difficulty. Why? Because, like every action, it is completely within your will. Now make the same gesture, but this time color it with a certain quality. Let this quality be caution. You will make your gesture, your movement cautiously. Have you not done it with the same ease? Do it again and again and then see what happens. Your movement, made cautiously, is no longer a mere physical action; now it has acquired a certain psychological nuance. What is this nuance?
>
> It is a Sensation of caution which now fills and permeates your arm. It is a psychophysical sensation.[81]

These feelings are reinforced through repetition of the action,[82] and the approach can then be attempted with imagined actions of the body as well as with real ones:

> All you need to do is say to yourself: "I am going to stand, to sit or to lie with this or that quality in my body," and the reaction will come immediately, calling up from within your soul a kaleidoscope of feelings.[83]

In Chekhov's view, 'Sensations' are "the simplest technical means for kindling your feelings."[84]

In his fourth approach Chekhov addresses not only the spontaneous generation of feelings within the actor, but also the spontaneous evocation of his will--his "wants, wishes, desires, longings, lusts, yearnings, or cravings"[85] (this spontaneous occurence of desires,

wants, etc. appears to be similar to Stanislavski's 'unconscious objectives'). Spontaneity of will, or 'unconscious objectives' are approached via a technique Chekhov calls the "Psychological Gesture" or 'P.G.'.[86] The 'P.G.' is an "archetypal gesture,"[87] a single movement or action performed by the actor which is simple, strong, and well-shaped. Repeated several times, this movement causes the actor's sense of will-power to grow increasingly strong. It also stimulates his desires and, like 'Sensations', stirs his feelings:

> . . . the strength of the movement stirs our will-power in general; the kind of movement awakens in us a definite corresponding desire, and the quality of the same movement conjures up our feelings.[88]

The purpose of the 'P.G.' is to evoke in the actor a spontaneous experience of the most essential quality or qualities of his character; as such, it is not shared with the audience directly,[89] but provides an inner foundation of the character within the actor. Chekhov offers an example:

> Imagine that you are going to play a character which, according to your first general impression, has a strong and unbending will, is possessed by dominating, despotic desires, and is filled with hatred and disgust.
>
> You look for a suitable over-all gesture which can express all this in the character, and perhaps after a few attempts you find it. . . .
>
> It is strong and well shaped. When repeated several times it will tend to strengthen your will. The direction of each limb, the final position of the whole body as well as the inclination of the head are such that they are bound to call up a definite desire for dominating and despotic conduct. The qualities which fill and permeate each muscle of the entire body, will provoke within you feelings of hatred and disgust. Thus, through the gesture, you penetrate and stimulate the depths of your own psychology.[90]

Altering or building upon the 'P.G.' will change the effects upon the actor's will and feelings:

> Now you continue developing the PG, correcting and improving it, adding to it all the qualities you find in the character, slowly leading it to the stage of perfection. After a short experience you will be able to find the correct PG practically at once, and will have only to improve it according to your or your director's taste while aiming at its final version.[91]

Chekhov reinforces that this process must be spontaneous, as "the PG itself will lead you to this discovery, without too much interference on the part of the reasoning mind."[92] He adds a final note regarding the "tempo,"[93] or pace, at which the 'P.G.' is performed. Altering the tempo has a profound effect upon the way in which the 'P.G.' affects the actor's will and feelings: "The same PG made in different tempos might change all its qualities, its strength of will and its susceptibility to different coloration."[94]

Chekhov's fifth approach to spontaneity appears to be an extension of his 'imagination', 'Sensation', and 'P.G.' techniques. This is his method of "character and characterization."[95] It consists of three different kinds of exercises: 'imaginary body'; 'imaginary centre'; and 'characterization'. 'Imaginary body' and 'characterization' both involve imagining, selecting, and incorporating physical aspects of the character. 'Imaginary body' exercises explore the larger considerations of physical size, posture, and distribution of body tension, while 'characterization' exercises explore the smaller subtler gestures and mannerisms of the character. In 'imaginary body' exercises, the actor assimilates or 'incorporates' the major physical characteristics of his character, selected through a process of imagination. The result, either immediately or after a period of time, is that the actor will "begin to feel and think of [himself] as another

person," as his "whole being, psychologically and physically, will be changed":[96]

> When really taken on and exercised, the imaginary body stirs the actor's will and feelings; it harmonizes them with the characteristic speech and movements, it transforms the actor into another person![97]

The assimilation of smaller physical gestures and mannerisms, or 'characterization', also gives the actor immediate access to his inner emotions. These subtler assimilations can be just as significant as the larger ones, as "sometimes the characterization alone can suddenly call forth the entire character."[98]

In the 'imaginary center' exercises, the actor imagines that he possesses a center from which all his inner activity and energy flow. By fixing the location of the center within his body (or occasionally outside it), and by ascribing to it qualities of size, shape, texture, weight, and other characteristics, the actor will find that his "whole psychological and physical attitude will change."[99] The 'imaginary center' has the power to "suddenly or gradually coordinate all your movements, influence the entire bodily attitude, motivate your behavior, action and speech, and tune your psychology in such a way that you will quite naturally experience the sensation. . . ."[100] As with the 'P.G.', varying the location and the qualities of the center serves to vary the kind of character experienced by the actor: "Innumerable possibilities will be opened to you if you experiment in this way, freely and playfully."[101]

Each of the 'character and characterization' exercises, 'imaginary body', 'characterization', and 'imaginary centre', may be used "in combination or one at a time,"[102] as the actor moves through the process of creating his character.

The final approach to spontaneity presented by Chekhov is his extension of Constantin Stanislavski's concept of the "objective"--the desire, the aim, the goal of the character.[103] Chekhov's use of the 'P.G.' in stimulating these desires in the actor has already been discussed; but Chekhov now focuses on the subsequent and spontaneous effect of the 'objective' upon the actor's emotions, as "the feelings and emotions, naturally, accompany your objectives."[104] An objective cannot simply be the product of the "reasoning mind,"[105] or else the actor "may know it, but may not wish or want it. . . . It may remain in your head like a headline without arousing your will."[106] The conscious selection of objectives for the character is therefore insufficient; the objective must be meaningful. Stanislavski deals with the problem by stressing that the selection of objectives be undertaken very carefully, until ones are found which excite and stimulate the actor. Chekhov, however, takes a slightly different approach, recommending that objectives can be found spontaneously through some of the other approaches, such as the 'P.G.' or 'Sensations'.[107] Thus, Chekhov believes that these spontaneous or 'unconscious' objectives can be actively sought out, and not simply hoped for as a by-product of the acting process, as is the implication with Stanislavski. For both, however, the power of the 'objective' to generate and focus the actor's emotions is paramount.

In Chekhov's view, any and all of these approaches can be utilized by the actor to achieve spontaneity. Through these techniques, the actor is enabled to establish the link between his body and his psychology, between his physical self and his desires, thoughts, and emotions. These inner psychological processes become subject to

the actor's control through the vehicles of his body and his imagination. The precise approach depends upon the actor and upon the circumstances of the play:

> . . . it is not necessary to use all the available means at one and the same time. You can choose those which appeal to you most, or those which give you the best and quickest results. You will soon notice that some are more suitable for one part and some for another. Make your choice freely. In time you will be able to try out all of them and perhaps use them with equal facility and success; but do not overload yourself with more than is necessary for the optimum performance of your part.[108]

Summary

For Michael Chekhov, spontaneity is the essence of the actor's art. The actor must experience all the unique emotions, desires, and inner aspects of his character. This cannot be achieved through a dry reasoned process of analysis and decision-making, but results from the direct interaction between his physical body and his subconscious. This interaction is catalyzed by the controlled activity of the actor's body and imagination. All of Chekhov's approaches require the actor to engage his body and imagination in tasks or sequences of tasks, so that he will not fall prey to any of the psychological obstacles to spontaneity within himself. Chekhov believes that spontaneity must not only be present at certain moments in rehearsal or performance, but must characterize every moment of every performance, rehearsal, and exercise. Only then will he ensure his development as a creative artist and be enabled to offer his audience a true artistic experience.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Chekhov, Michael. To The Actor. New York: Harper and Row, 1953. p. 3

[2]Ibid. p. 40 [3]Ibid. p. 36 [4]Ibid. p. 38 [5]Ibid. p. 46

[6]Ibid. p. 40 [7]Ibid. p. 58 [8]Ibid. p. 46 [9]Ibid. p. 36

[10]Ibid. p. 33 [11]Ibid. p. 28 [12]Ibid. p. 27

[13]Ibid. p. 73 [14]Ibid. pp. 172-3 [15]Ibid. p. 98

[16]Ibid. p. 73 [17]Ibid. [18]Ibid. pp. 13-4 [19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid. pp. 14, 16 [21]Ibid. p. 15 [22]Ibid. pp. 17-8

[23]Ibid. [24]Ibid. [25]Ibid. [26]Ibid. [27]Ibid. p. 8

[28]Ibid. p. 7 [29]Ibid. p. 40 [30]Ibid. p. 4

[31]Ibid. p. 3 [32]Ibid. p. 38 [33]Ibid. p. 43

[34]Ibid. pp. 160-2 [35]Ibid. p. 1 [36]Ibid. p. 176

[37]Ibid. p. 37 [38]Ibid. p. 35 [39]Ibid. p. 3 [40]Ibid. p. 29

[41]Ibid. p. 144 [42]Ibid. pp. 26-7 [43]Ibid. p. 95

[44]Ibid. pp. 95-6 [45]Ibid. p. 40 [46]Ibid. p. 170

[47]Ibid. p. 3 [48]Ibid. p. 25 [49]Ibid. [50]Ibid. [51]Ibid. pp. 2-3

[52]Ibid. pp. 173-4 [53]Ibid. [54]Ibid. [55]Ibid. p. 6

[56]Ibid. p. 25 [57]Ibid. pp. 31-2 [58]Ibid. p. 33

[59]Ibid. p. 32 [60]Ibid. [61]Ibid. p. 33 [62]Ibid. p. 34

[63]Ibid. p. 36 [64]Ibid. p. 37 [65]Ibid. p. 38 [66]Ibid. p. 46

[67]Ibid. p. 39 [68]Ibid. pp. 50-1 [69]Ibid. [70]Ibid. p. 51

[71]Ibid. p. 48 [72]Ibid. p. 62 [73]Ibid. p. 50 [74]Ibid. pp. 55-7

[75]Ibid. [76]Ibid. p. 58 [77]Ibid. pp. 59-61 [78]Ibid. p. 59

[79]Ibid. [80]Ibid. [81]Ibid. [82]Ibid. [83]Ibid. p. 60 [84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid. p. 63 [86]Ibid. pp. 63-84 [87]Ibid. p. 77
[88]Ibid. pp. 64-5 [89]Ibid. p. 82 [90]Ibid. pp. 64-5
[91]Ibid. pp. 74-5 [92]Ibid. [93]Ibid. pp. 83-4
[94]Ibid. p. 78 [95]Ibid. pp. 85-93 [96]Ibid. p. 87
[97]Ibid. [98]Ibid. p. 92 [99]Ibid. p. 89 [100]Ibid.
[101]Ibid. p. 90 [102]Ibid. p. 91 [103]Ibid. p. 155
[104]Ibid. [105]Ibid. p. 168 [106]Ibid. [107]Ibid. pp. 169-70
[108]Ibid. p. 170

CHAPTER FIVE

JERZY GROTOWSKI

No contemporary acting theorist or theatre practitioner has so deeply penetrated the essence of the actor's art as has Jerzy Grotowski. Through his studies and work at the Polish Laboratory Theatre, Grotowski evolved a theory and methodology of acting based upon his developing understanding of the basic principles of acting and, in particular, the principle of spontaneity.

Theory

Underlying Grotowski's entire approach to acting is his belief that the actor must not merely illustrate or imitate an experience before an audience, but must actually undergo the most intense and deepest personal experience of his role at the moment it is being played out. It is the actor's complete discipline and control over his body and mind which allow this immediate, authentic, and spontaneous experience to take place. This union of spontaneity and discipline Grotowski calls the 'total act', as it completely engages the actor's body, his mind, and his emotions:

> It [the total act] is the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself. Not in order to "show oneself off," for that would be exhibitionism. It is a serious and solemn act of revelation. The actor must be prepared to be absolutely sincere. It is like a step towards the summit of the actor's organism in which consciousness and instinct are united.[1]

The total act is not "just one mechanical (and therefore rigid) gesture of arm or leg, not any grimace, helped by a logical inflection and a thought."[2] Rather it is "an act of extreme sincerity . . . modelled in a living organism, in impulses, a way of breathing, a rhythm of thought and the circulation of blood. . . ."[3] For Grotowski, any such act is the result of a union of "spontaneity and formal discipline."[4] In such an act the actor, through rigorous attention to the physiological gestures of "signs,"[5] is able to call up his deepest and most powerful emotional energies:

> The decisive principle remains the following: the more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us, in the excess, in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign. Here lies the whole principle of expressiveness.[6]

Grotowski reinforces the point:

> We find that artificial composition not only does not limit the spiritual but actually leads to it. (The tropistic tension between the inner process and the form strengthens both. The form is like a baited trap, to which the spiritual process responds spontaneously and against which it struggles.)[7]

In this process, "reactions must not be sought. . . . If they are not spontaneous they are of no use."[8]

For Grotowski, then, spontaneity is at the center of the 'total act', as the actor experiences and offers a revelation of his own inner self, through the disciplined "artificiality"[9] of his role.

In interpreting the terminology used by Grotowski to describe the acting process and, in particular, the concept of spontaneity, one finds that it is often philosophical, even theological or mystical in tone. This is not necessarily traced, however, to any identification of hitherto unknown acting principles, but rather to the

highly personal nature of his research. Grotowski himself states that "we realize that we have not started from scratch but are operating in a defined and special atmosphere,"[10] and explains that "my terminology has arisen from personal experience and personal research."[11] Grotowski's grasp of the basic principles of acting theory, and much of his methodology, is not dissimilar from the conclusions and practice of other theoretricians. Rather, it is the purity and singleness of purpose of his work which gives rise to an often contradictory terminology, even where a common understanding is shared.

In addition to its meaning in the context of the 'total act', spontaneity is identified by Grotowski as "self-penetration,"[12] "authenticity,"[13] "revelation,"[14] "translumination,"[15] and "natural" or "organic" acting.[16] The opposite process, where spontaneity is not a factor, he refers to as "illustrating,"[17] "exhibiting,"[18] "explaining the role,"[19] "mechanical acting,"[20] "showing oneself off,"[21] "imitating,"[22] "shamming,"[23] "automatic reproduction,"[24] and "publicotropism--playing for the audience."[25] Grotowski further identifies two kinds of the latter, non-spontaneous process, one which is calculated and superficial, and the other which he sees as a kind of self-induced "hysteria."[26] The former is to be found in the 'epic'[27] theatre or in the repertoire of the "bag of tricks"[28] or "cliche"[29] actor. The latter exists in the actor who is "'living' a part"[30] by "pumping up great emotions"[31] within himself. Both kinds are, in Grotowski's view, manifestations of "publicotropism"[32]--the actor's need to play for an audience.

Although Grotowski writes from the perspective of the director/

teacher, he is concerned primarily that the actor recognize the differing characteristics between spontaneous and non-spontaneous acting. Many of the characteristics of both processes can be perceived by the director/teacher or by the audience, but Grotowski's emphasis is upon the actor's ultimate responsibility for the theatrical event, and therefore, for his own training and development. The 'producer's' task is to establish an atmosphere where this development can take place, and to assist the actor in facing and working through the process. Recognizing the characteristics of spontaneity, and of its opposite, are a necessary part of that process.

Grotowski identifies four main characteristics of spontaneity: the absence of self-consciousness; freedom from 'thought'; a sense of confidence and humility; a relationship with the audience which is 'holy'.

By self-consciousness, Grotowski means that state in which the actor is aware of his body and how it is reacting (or ought to be reacting) to the stimuli offered by the role. He finds himself analysing or projecting <u>how</u> a certain action or response should be performed, or is aware of the effects of his actions upon the audience. The spontaneous or 'total' actor, on the other hand, ceases to be aware of his body as a vehicle for performance and simply exists, acting and reacting to the various internal and external impulses that his role presents to him:

> The result is freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns. . . .[33]

In the spontaneous 'impulse-action' described by Grotowski,

two more characteristics of spontaneity are present. Both are embodied in a state of mind within the actor which Grotowski calls the state of "passive readiness," in which the actor "does not want to do that" but rather "refrains from not doing it."[34] This "idle readiness" or "passive availability"[35] is characterized by two qualities of mind--freedom from 'thinking' about the role and a sense of confidence and humility. Both are characteristics of spontaneity. To Grotowski, thinking with the mind (as opposed to thinking with the body) is the enemy of spontaneity. In his view, the most a thought can do for the actor is to provide an impulse to action;[36] it cannot determine what the action will be, how it will be carried out, or what the result will be. He states, ". . . it is better not to think but to act, to take risks."[37] Thus, the actor who finds himself thinking about what his response should be, or how it should be played, will know that he is not engaged in a spontaneous process or 'total act'. The same is true for an actor who finds himself imitating or representing his role's particular actions or state of mind; the conscious, thoughtful process which gives rise to imitation or representation and which inhibits spontaneity can and must be recognized by the actor for what it is.[38] The other quality of 'passive readiness' is the presence within the actor of a sense of confidence and humility. In using these terms, Grotowski is not concerned with their moral overtones but with their truth in relation to the actor's experiencing of himself in his work. He does not mean modesty or bravery in the actor's analysis of or approach to his work, but rather how he experiences himself in relation to the work at the moment of engagement:

> One must give oneself totally, in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love. Here lies the key. Self-penetration, trance, excess, the formal discipline itself--all this can be realized, provided one has given oneself fully, humbly and without defense.[39]

This sense of humility and confidence is the third characteristic of spontaneity.

The fourth way in which spontaneity manifests itself to the actor is in his relationship to the audience. The spontaneous actor in performance does not experience himself as an entertainer or performer (Grotowski's term is "courtesan actor")[40] or as a teacher of the audience.[41] He does not try to manipulate them into a particular emotional response or frame of mind (to "grip them");[42] he does not make the audience his point of orientation at all.[43] By this Grotowski means that the actor does not act for the audience, but shares or confronts them with his own experience, with himself,[44] or, further, ". . . he must fulfill an authentic act in place of the spectators, an act of extreme yet disciplined sincerity and authenticity."[45] Through this relationship, the audience is enabled to "undertake a similar process of self-penetration"[46] and so be confronted with "the truth about himself and his mission in life."[47] To this extent the experience of spontaneity manifests itself to the audience, though Grotowski points out that the spectator's experience depends upon his willingness to "accept the actor's invitation" or, conversely, his need to "keep his mask of lies intact at all costs."[48]

For Grotowski, then, the characteristics of spontaneity are the actor's lack of self-consciousness, his freedom from the analytic processes of the mind, the qualities of confidence and humility he

experiences, and his feeling of sharing with or confronting, rather than performing for, his audience. If spontaneity is present, the audience then has the opportunity to enter into the experience, though they may choose not to do so. Without spontaneity, however, the opportunity is not presented them.

It becomes evident in examining the concept and characteristics of spontaneity as presented by Grotowski that it, in union with a disciplined form, establishes the foundation of his entire theory as, in fact, these two elements are "the basic aspects of the actor's work":[49]

> I believe there can be no true creative process within the actor if he lacks discipline or spontaneity. Meyerhold based his work on discipline, exterior formation; Stanislavski on the spontaneity of daily life. These are, in fact, the two complementary aspects of the creative process.[50]

The purpose of Grotowski's theatre is to create an event; theatre is "what takes place between spectator and actor."[51] In order for the event not to be cheap, false, superficial, or hypocritical, Grotowski looks to the truly creative act--that which combines both discipline and spontaneity--wherein the actor confronts himself and his audience with his own life, his own vulnerabilities, his own deepest self, and in so doing enables for all a kind of communion or transcendence.[52] This is Grotowski's aesthetic, and its essence is spontaneity, the process by which the actor himself is liberated, expressed, and experienced, through the actor's own body and voice:

> It is the true lesson of the sacred theatre . . . this knowledge that spontaneity and discipline, far from weakening each other, mutually reinforce themselves; that what is elementary feeds what is constructed and vice versa, to become the real source of a kind of acting that glows.[53]

The application of the lesson is that "the actor must not illustrate but accomplish an 'act of the soul', and he does this 'by means of his own organism'."[54]

Methodology

Grotowski's methodology appears to contain three essential elements for attaining spontaneity: the first is the establishment and maintenance of an atmosphere of openness and acceptance; the second is the "via negativa"--the elimination of those elements within the actor which "block" the process of spontaneity;[55] the third aspect is the establishing of a "score" of impulses for the actor's mind and body, which he plays out and to which he responds.[56] These aspects are generally addressed concurrently rather than consecutively, although there is a cause and effect relationship between the first and second aspects, and between the second and third.

In setting the actor on the road to spontaneity, then, Grotowski's first consideration is the atmosphere in which the work will be undertaken. The process often involves some personal psychological risk on the part of the actor, and so an atmosphere must be created in which he is enabled to take such risks:

> The essential problem is to give the actor the possibility of working "in security". The work of the actor is in danger; it is submitted to continuous supervision and observation. An atmosphere must be created, a working system in which the actor feels that he can do absolutely anything, will be understood and accepted. It is often at the moment when the actor understands this that he reveals himself. . . . There is no question of the actor having to do what the producer proposes. He must realize that he can

> do whatever he likes and that even if in the end his own suggestions are not accepted, they will never be used against him. . . . He must be accepted as a human being, as he is.[57]

Responsibility for creating this atmosphere lies with the producer (director):

> . . . the producer can help the actor in this complex and agonizing process only if he is just as emotionally and warmly open to the actor as the actor is in regard to him. I do not believe in the possibility of achieving effects by means of cold calculation. A kind of warmth towards one's fellow men is essential--an understanding of the contradictions in man, and that he is a suffering creature but not one to be scorned. . . . This element of warm openness is technically tangible. It alone, if reciprocal, can enable the actor to undertake the most extreme efforts without any fear of being laughed at or humiliated.[58]

Within the secure environment, actors begin to face and overcome the resistances to spontaneity which are present in their minds and bodies. Grotowski calls this approach a "via negativa--not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks."[59] The first step is to question the actor:

> What are the obstacles blocking you on your way towards the total act which must engage all your psycho-physical resources, from the most instinctive to the most rational?[60]

These obstacles are generally physical in nature (the actor is too contracted, for example, resulting in a blocking of the natural respiratory process), but the cause is "almost always of a physical or psychological nature."[61]

Like the other theoretricians, Grotowski identifies motivational problems as often lying at the core of psychological resistances to spontaneity in the actor:

> This [total] act cannot exist if the actor is more concerned with charm, personal success, applause and salary than with creation as understood in its highest form. It cannot

> exist if the actor conditions it according to the size of his part, his place in the performance, the day or kind of audience. There can be no total act if the actor, even away from the theatre, dissipates his creative impulse and, as we said before, sullies it, blocks it, particularly through incidental engagements of a doubtful nature or by the premeditated use of the creative act as a means to further his own career.[62]

Even where these motivations are not present, resistances may be deeply rooted in the actor's psyche, reinforced by a lifetime of social, moral, and cultural behavioral codes and habits. These must also be overcome, for, as Grotowski states, "Art cannot be bound by the laws of common morality or catechism."[63] The actor is thus called to "cast off his everyday mask," and "to reveal himself through excess, profanation, and outrageous sacrilege."[64]

Grotowski approaches the task of enabling the actor to precipitate a 'total act' through a process first of observation and then of development of a highly personalized system of exercises. He observes the actor in the general sets of exercises assigned to the group or to particular individuals, noting first the areas and moments of resistance to a particular exercise, and second, those moments where the process is not hindered by resistance. He then ascertains the causes or factors which are contributing to the problem, and ultimately organizes exercises to eliminate those factors. In Grotowski's example of respiration, the 'contracted' actor's natural type of respiration is identified through observation of him in "moments of conflict, play, or flirtation."[65] Grotowski can then determine the cause or causes of the obstacle in those exercises where the respiration is not natural. These causes (usually psychological in nature) are then addressed through specialized exercises designed

to enable the actor to confront whatever psychological barriers are creating the tensions which inhibit his natural respiration. Thus as Grotowski states, "ours is a negative technique, not a positive one."[66]

Overcoming psycho-physical resistances opens the door for the third aspect of Grotowski's process: establishing and playing the '<u>score</u>'. The actor "constructs his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words."[67] Grotowski prefers to use the term, 'score', rather than 'role', as the latter generally refers to the text or implies a particular conception of the character.[68] The 'score', on the other hand, "consists of the elements of human contact,"[69] of "articulated signs."[70] A sign may be a word, a gesture, a quality of voice, a thought, an action, or an inner statement of will.[71] Signs serve as impulses which evoke psycho-physical responses,[72] and the resulting score is essential to spontaneity in performance:

> Next I want to advise you never in the performance to seek for spontaneity without a score. . . . During performance no real spontaneity is possible without a score. It would only be an imitation of spontaneity since you would destroy your spontaneity by chaos.[73]

It is important to note that Grotowski differentiates between the spontaneity of improvisation, in which a certain framework of details is laid down and from which a number of variations of action and response are possible,[74] and the spontaneity of performance, which arises from the actor's psycho-physical response to the established sequence and rhythm of the predetermined 'signs' which make up the score. This differentiation is often implicit in the work of other

theoretricians, but Grotowski is the only one who articulates it clearly.

The ability of the actor to discover and respond to the score is determined by his success in overcoming resistances to the state of 'passive readiness' discussed earlier in the chapter. The presence of this passive mental and physical state makes possible the realization of the score, through the vehicle of the actor's total being. Grotowski notes that the actor cannot accomplish this realization directly, by wanting to do it, but rather by "resigning from not doing it":[75]

> . . . you should not strive for this. Only act with your whole self. In the most important moment in your role, reveal your most personal and closely guarded experience. At other moments use only signs, but justify those signs.[76]

The process is not accomplished all at once, but "step by step," as the actor becomes increasingly free of the resistances within himself.[77] The actor learns to "think with the whole body, by means of actions":

> Don't think of the result, and certainly not of how beautiful the result may be. If it grows spontaneously and organically, like live impulses, it will always be beautiful--far more beautiful than any amount of calculated results put together.[78]

Summary

For Jerzy Grotowski, then, the actor's task--the creative act--is to engage in a fusion of spontaneity and form, wherein each gives rise to the other. This is accomplished through the systematic eradication of the physical and psychic resistances within himself which block spontaneity, and by developing his body's sensitivity and responsiveness to the psychic impulses generated by his role or 'score'. Through this process, the actor is enabled to "reveal and sacrifice

that innermost part of himself--the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world,"[79] and in so doing, invites his audience to do the same.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Grotowski, Jerzy. Towards a Poor Theatre. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968. p. 210

[2]Ibid. p. 123 [3]Ibid. p. 124 [4]Ibid. p. 39

[5]Ibid. [6]Ibid. [7]Ibid. p. 17 [8]Ibid. p. 181

[9]Ibid. p. 139 [10]Ibid. p. 24 [11]Ibid. p. 204

[12]Ibid. p. 34 [13]Ibid. p. 204 [14]Ibid. p. 210

[15]Ibid. p. 16 [16]Ibid. p. 213 [17]Ibid. p. 123

[18]Ibid. p. 210 [19]Ibid. p. 212 [20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid. p. 210 [22]Ibid. p. 236 [23]Ibid. p. 260

[24]Ibid. [25]Ibid. p. 251 [26]Ibid. p. 246 [27]Ibid. p. 37

[28]Ibid. pp. 16, 34 [29]Ibid. p. 235 [30]Ibid. p. 37

[31]Ibid. p. 246 [32]Ibid. p. 242 [33]Ibid. p. 16

[34]Ibid. p. 17 [35]Ibid. p. 37 [36]Ibid. p. 123

[37]Ibid. p. 204 [38]Ibid. p. 236 [39]Ibid. p. 38

[40]Ibid. p. 34 [41]Ibid. p. 130 [42]Ibid. p. 34

[43]Ibid. p. 213 [44]Ibid. p. 214 [45]Ibid. [46]Ibid. p. 34

[47]Ibid. p. 40 [48]Ibid. p. 46 [49]Ibid. p. 261

[50]Ibid. p. 209 [51]Ibid. p. 32 [52]Ibid. pp. 34-5, 256-7

[53]Ibid. p. 12 [54]Ibid. p. 257 [55]Ibid. p. 17

[56]Ibid. p. 35 [57]Ibid. p. 211 [58]Ibid. p. 47

[59]Ibid. p. 17 [60]Ibid. p. 209 [61]Ibid. pp. 208-9

[62]Ibid. p. 262 [63]Ibid. p. 257 [64]Ibid. p. 34

[65]Ibid. pp. 208-9 [66]Ibid. [67]Ibid. p. 35

[68]Ibid. p. 211 [69]Ibid. p. 212 [70]Ibid. p. 17
[71]Ibid. p. 18 [72]Ibid. p. 235 [73]Ibid. p. 234
[74]Ibid. [75]Ibid. p. 17 [76]Ibid. p. 238 [77]Ibid.
[78]Ibid. p. 204 [79]Ibid. p. 35

CHAPTER SIX

ROBERT BENEDETTI

In his theory and methodology of acting as outlined in The Actor at Work, Robert Benedetti does not employ the specific term, 'spontaneity', to describe a particular quality of acting. His observations and experiences regarding the basic concepts of acting do reveal an understanding and appreciation of the concept of spontaneity, however, and his grasp of the essential characteristics of the acting process parallels much of the views of Stanislavski and the other theoretricians discussed in this thesis. Benedetti quotes frequently from the writing of Stanislavski, mentioning one of the latter's concepts in particular which sums up Benedetti's own view: "Stanislavski called the difference between acting filled with the true experience of the actor and acting that merely emulated the surface appearances of things as 'the difference between seeming and being'."[1]

Theory

It is Benedetti's view of acting theory that the actor is not (or ought not to be) engaged simply in an illusion or representation of reality, but rather in a direct experiencing of reality:

> It is never enough, however, for the actor merely to put on a convincing mask, merely to seem to be someone else; he must wear the mask of his character with such total commitment that he creates an independent and meaningful reality

> with its own deeper truth. His fundamental task is therefore a dual one--he must seem and also be. No matter how much he seems to be someone else, his creation must also have its own personal reality; it must exist not only as a representation but as a unique creation in its own right.[2]

Benedetti equates the representational style of acting with the act of telling the audience who and what the character is, instead of allowing them to discover these things through participating in the actor's experience: "In short, your job is not to explain, but faithfully to relive your character's actions. . . ."[3] This experience is achieved by "recreating the living process."[4]

Another term used by Benedetti to describe the representational or illusionistic style of acting is 'indicating': ". . . you indicate by showing us that you are doing something instead of really doing it."[5] He also describes this form of acting as "premeditated" and "pretending."[6] He then goes on to describe the alternate process, a key characteristic of which is "centering," in which the actor's energy must "flow spontaneously from (his) deepest center." These "impulses" flow into movements, sounds, words, and emotions:[7]

> You must experience the unbroken flow of energy from the stimulus, through the decision into the activity toward the object; your full sense of your action must encompass this entire process, so that your defined action is not a static image but is rather a name for an experienced flow of energy.[8]

Benedetti explains:

> . . . each of your character's actions causes a reaction in another character, or within your own character, or both. Each reaction serves in turn as a new action, causing yet another reaction, and so on.[9]

In Benedetti's terms, then, spontaneous acting is a re-creation, a reliving, a process of "deep inner impulses flowing spontaneously into physical form." It is an experience of being, rather than a

representation of it.

Benedetti considers the recognition of the characteristics of this spontaneous quality in acting to be primarily the responsibility of the actor himself, and only secondarily the responsibility of the teacher-director or audience. He believes that the actor has or can develop the capability to understand and experience the difference between acting which possesses the element of 'reliving' and acting which does not. He also makes the point that, while the power of recognition lies within the actor, the actor is by no means always willing to exercise it. He describes what can result:

> As a way of avoiding the "here and now" and maintaining selfish control of their individual performances, some actors only pretend to see and hear the other actors on stage; actually, they are only superficially aware of their teammates. They are reacting instead to their prepared projection of what they would like their partner to be doing, not to what is actually before them. While such premeditated, false reactions might appear correct to an audience, the ensemble effort and therefore the play as a whole must inevitably suffer.[10]

Because the reactions of such actors can sometimes "appear correct" to the audience, essential responsibility for recognizing spontaneity must rest with the actor. In Benedetti's view, he can begin to exercise this responsibility by examining his own motives. Is he striving to fulfill his character's dramatic objectives, or is his main concern with creating a particular response in the audience.[11] Is he motivated by anxiety, by a need to please, a desire to show what he can do, or by overeagerness and impatience. All of these conditions Benedetti labels "inhibitions"[12] and these inhibitions, if not recognized by the actor for what they are, will continue to rob his acting of spontaneity.

Aside from his personal motivations, the actor can identify spontaneity in his work by becoming aware of certain qualities in his acting. These are: concentration; awareness of fellow actors; movement and vocal qualities; and emotional energy. For Benedetti's 'reliving' actor, concentration means being in a state of "restful alertness," relaxed but energized.[13] He is dually conscious of audience and the world of the play, with his focus upon his dramatic task;[14] he concentrates upon what he is doing, not how.[15] He is sensorily and emotionally aware of his fellow actors and can "truly see, hear, and feel his partner at all times."[16] He finds that his movements are clear, purposeful, economical, and forceful,[17] and movement, sound, and thinking are more integrated, and do not seem stiff or superficial.[18] This actor finds that he is a "reactor,"[19] and that his emotional energy is not created or imposed; it arises out of action.[20] He experiences the emotional life of the character.[21]

The representational or pretending actor, on the other hand, is distractable and concentrates primarily on the response being generated in the audience; or, he may be simply "going through the motions."[22] He protects himself "against the unknown of experience with the illusion of a clear intellectual plan" and in rehearsal his work consists of the "mere enactment of a premeditated plan."[23]

While audiences can sometimes be fooled, it is Benedetti's view that they, too, are often able to recognize the actor who is or is not reliving his part. They may find themselves unaffected by the performance of the unspontaneous actor, sensing that it lacks the "ring of authenticity."[24] They may feel that the actor is actually transmitting the message, "look at me doing this," or may be aware

that he is exerting a tremendous effort into his performance:

> Such a mechanical performance may seem to satisfy an audience that lacks any point of comparison, but to any sensitive theatregoer (and to any sensitive actor) it will be woefully lacking in that special aliveness that separates great theatre from merely competent theatre.[25]

In contrast, they find the 'reliving' actor to be "free-flowing" and "organic" with a quality of "naturalness."[26] They are affected emotionally by what is happening to the character; they empathize. There is a communication of emotional experience from the actor to the audience.[27]

Benedetti's theory reveals the importance he places upon spontaneity:

> No amount of intellectual or psychological analysis will replace the actual <u>experiencing</u> of the character. . . .[28]

He elaborates:

> It is as you begin to <u>experience</u> this flow of action that you begin to make the best discoveries, for only then are you truly moved beyond yourself, taking inspiration from the energies of others and from the play itself, and thereby participating in a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.
>
> Under the influence of such an experience you can be swept beyond your self and being to discover not only what you already are, but also what you may <u>become</u> as your character, that new version of yourself, grows.[29]

In Benedetti's view, the importance of 'reliving' or 'experiencing' the enactment of one's character is paramount: "Whatever pace and tempo may be required of a given scene, all deliberate choices made by your character must be relived each time they are enacted, or the performance will seem inevitably hollow.[30] He elaborates upon numerous other elements, such as vocal and physical gesture, script

analysis and interpretation, and dramatic structure, but stresses continually and throughout The Actor at Work that without this 'spontaneous flow of energy' the actor will be compromising the play, the character, and his own growth and development. Thus, representational acting or "indicating" is to be avoided "not only because it looks and feels false on stage, but also because it prevents you from having a deep and meaningful experience of your task."[31]

The actor will also be compromising the audience:

> On the stage you always strive for such acuteness and completeness of experience. You owe such fullness to your audience as well as to yourself and your fellow actors, for whatever your play may be saying to them about their world, your performance should be reminding them of their own potential aliveness.[32]

Merely representing the character is going to prove insufficient in accomplishing this goal. Pretending to act and seeming to react are not enough:

> . . . until each actor is truly acting and reacting with each of the others as fellow workers, the transactions between the characters cannot be vivid and forceful, and the play as a whole cannot move forcefully.[33]

Benedetti also emphasizes the importance of this process in rehearsal, as well as performance: "Never merely 'perform your rehearsal'; have a living experience within the boundaries you established in your preparation each time you rehearse or perform."[34]

For the actor's own development, then , as well as for the sake of the play and the audience, the element of spontaneity, of 'experiencing' or 'reliving' one's part, is a vital characteristic of the acting process.

Benedetti's theory regarding spontaneity is based upon his

concept that acting is either spontaneous or unspontaneous, that an actor will either 'live' his part or 'indicate' it. Recognition of the differences between the two kinds of acting is the actor's responsibility, as spontaneity results in a high level of concentration, an awareness of fellow actors, ease and economy of expression, and an experiencing of emotional energy. Benedetti consistently emphasizes that the quality of spontaneity is important and desirable in acting, both for the actor's growth as a creative artist and for the audience's experience of the play.

Methodology

Benedetti's methodology regarding spontaneity is based upon his view that an actor can learn to be spontaneous. Most of the techniques and exercises in The Actor at Work are designed, directly or indirectly, to induce spontaneity--to inspire the 'spontaneous flow of energy'. This is true whether or not the exercise is focused on characterization, dramatic action, emotion, concentration, movement, voice, or imagination. The underlying focus is consistently to induce an experiential participation by the actor in each exercise, scene, or play, committing fully his body, mind, and emotions. The realization of this commitment involves the overcoming of a variety of physical, vocal, and psychological inhibitions: "Our aim in these exercises is to lift inhibitions toward physical and vocal gesture, so that you can respond freely and fully to your text, but always with a sense of necessity and economy."[35]

The inhibitions to which Benedetti refers are, in his view,

traceable to inadequate physical or vocal training or, in the case of psychological inhibitions, to a preoccupation with one's own self, through fearfulness, anxiety to do well, a desire to show off, or a need to please. All of these result in bad acting habits.[36] Benedetti addresses these problems through specific exercises in relaxation, imagination, action and characterization.

> . . . the kind of relaxation we desire could be defined as that state in which the actor is most ready to react to the slightest stimuli. In other words, a state in which all inhibitions to movement or reaction have been lifted.[37]

Benedetti's relaxation exercises involve ridding unnecessary tensions from the body and bringing one's attention to the "here and now," thus creating the state of "restful alertness."[38] (It may be noted here that this state seems to be the same or similar to Grotowski's "passive readiness.") In this state, the actor is now ready to focus his awareness, to concentrate,[39] and to respond: "Relaxation permits an immediacy and flexibility of response."[40] One could also add that it permits the actuality of response, as the purpose of the relaxation exercises is to "lift any inhibitions" which would otherwise render an actual response impossible, through tension, lack of attention to the present moment, and inability to concentrate. Responses, if they are true responses, cannot be thought out beforehand, but must be experienced as they occur: ". . . your awareness, like any of your other energies, will flow naturally if you lift the inhibitions that impede its flow, if you can open yourself to immediate experience."[41] Relaxation establishes the possibility of experience, of concentration and imagination.

Unlike Stanislavski and his "magic if," Benedetti does not devote a great deal of time to exercises specifically addressing development of imagination, or the achievement of a 'living experience' by the actor specifically through imagination. He makes the following statement regarding imagination, however:

> The actor must continually relate to things on stage as if they were something else, but he must not lose touch with the reality of his situation in the process. Let us say that those hot spotlights are supposed to be a moonlit sky; only a madman would fail to recognize the lights shining in his eyes, or the rows of people where a meadow ought to be. The actor accepts these sensations in all their reality and then reacts to them as if they were sky and meadow. In this way, your responses can always be real, though the form in which they are expressed is artistically controlled.[42]

Thus, the state of belief in the imaginary situation is a critical step in the process leading to spontaneity.

After relaxation and imagination, Benedetti's third step on the path to spontaneous acting is 'action'. Benedetti defines action as "a purposefully focused energy arising in response to a stimulus, which, through a process of choice, results in directed activity toward an objective, creating an event."[43] In a given play, 'events' are, for the most part, already determined. It seems for Benedetti, however, that if the actor understands the stimulus for a character's particular action, and actively chooses and pursues an objective in response to that stimulus, the "external" portrayal of the event will contain the element of 'reliving': ". . . the whole process of action from stimulus to event is literally 'your inside becoming your outside'."[44] Benedetti elaborates on this process in his chapter on Action, Emotion, and Character, in which he quotes William Ball of

the American Conservatory Theatre, "Do the act and the feeling will follow."[45] The actor's process is as follows: ". . . if he adopts with his whole self the symptoms of the character's emotion in the course of pursuing his action, the fullness of the specific emotion will grow within him."[46]

Aside from its direct effect upon the emotions of the actor, 'action' is also one of the two means by which spontaneity of 'characterization' is achieved. The process of characterization seems to 'call up' the emotions of the actor in two ways: first, emotional energy is generated by performing a focused (purposeful) physical action:

> In short, character grows out of action: don't worry about "being the character" first and then doing things "because that's what my character would do"; instead, do the things your character does in the way he does them and see, under the influence of these specific actions, whom they cause you to become!
>
> Characterization, therefore, is a means to an end, never an end in itself.[47]

Secondly, emotion is induced through the assimilation by the actor into his whole body of the particular characteristics of a given emotional state:

> Your participation in the basic physical traits of the character is a powerful "trigger," which can generate a deeper sense of involvement in the thought and emotion of the character. Many actors use a walk, a posture, or a style of gesture as the starting point for their creation. No amount of intellectual or psychological analysis will replace the actual experiencing of the character that can occur when you begin to adopt his physical traits, assuming that these traits are accurate expressions of the other levels of characterizations, and also relate to the potential of your own body and voice.[48]

In both these ways the internal, emotional life of the actor as his character is stimulated by sources external.

For Benedetti, then, the path to spontaneity in acting (in his words, "reliving" or "experiencing") is through relaxation (the overcoming of inhibitions to responsiveness), imagination, action and characterization, the latter involving the two processes of physical action and assimilation. It is signjficant to note that in Benedetti's methodology, the overcoming of inhibitions does not seem to be synonymous with the generating of spontaneity. Rather, inhibitions are overcome through the relaxation process, while the spontaneous 'living of the part' is achieved through action and characterization.

Summary

Though the actual term 'spontaneity' is not central either to Benedetti's theory or his methodology, still his description of the concept of 'living one's part' and his delineation of the means to achieving this quality reveal that, whatever his terminology, he considers spontaneity an essential quality of acting. Spontaneity is characterized by the relaxed and concentrated flow of energy which the actor experiences when 'living his part', whether in rehearsal or in performance, and by his ability to become emotionally involved in the world of the play.

For Benedetti, a central assumption concerning spontaneity is that an actor can be taught the means by which it may be consistently achieved. These means are: the actor's achieving a relaxed uninhibited physical and mental state; his experiencing a sense of belief; his entering into the world of the play via the actions of his character and the assimilation of its physical qualities.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Benedetti, Robert. The Actor at Work. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1976. p. 241

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid. p. 105 [4]Ibid. p. 108 [5]Ibid. p. xvii

[6]Ibid. p. 63 [7]Ibid. p. 33 [8]Ibid. p. 205

[9]Ibid. p. 188 [10]Ibid. p. 63 [11]Ibid. p. 69

[12]Ibid. p. xvii [13]Ibid. p. 11 [14]Ibid. p. 69

[15]Ibid. p. 153 [16]Ibid. p. 63 [17]Ibid. p. 35

[18]Ibid. p. 21 [19]Ibid. p. 139 [20]Ibid. p. 210

[21]Ibid. p. 212 [22]Ibid. p. xvii [23]Ibid. p. 189

[24]Ibid. p. 23 [25]Ibid. p. 200 [26]Ibid. p. xvii

[27]Ibid. p. 212 [28]Ibid. p. 229 [29]Ibid. pp. 188-89

[30]Ibid. p. 200 [31]Ibid. p. xvii [32]Ibid. p. 188

[33]Ibid. p. 55 [34]Ibid. p. 130 [35]Ibid. p. 101

[36]Ibid. p. xvii [37]Ibid. p. 8 [38]Ibid. p. 9

[39]Ibid. p. 11 [40]Ibid. p. 13 [41]Ibid. p. 12

[42]Ibid. p. 42 [43]Ibid. p. 191 [44]Ibid. p. 205

[45]Ibid. p. 212 [46]Ibid. [47]Ibid. p. 227

[48]Ibid. p. 229

CHAPTER SEVEN

VIOLA SPOLIN

In her book, Improvisation for the Theatre, Viola Spolin presents a clear statement about theory and methodology of spontaneity. She offers an extensive definition and vocabulary for both spontaneity and lack of spontaneity, and provides numerous illustrations of the characteristics of spontaneous and non-spontaneous acting. Spolin also makes clear her belief in the importance of spontaneity in acting, and puts forward a detailed technique for its achievement.

Theory

Of the six theoretricians discussed in this thesis, Viola Spolin is the only one who builds a vocabulary of acting theory around the specific term, "spontaneity":

> The intuitive can only respond in immediacy--right now. It comes bearing its gifts in the moment of spontaneity, the moment when we are freed to relate and act, involving ourselves in the moving, changing world around us. . . .
>
> Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it, and act accordingly. . . .
>
> It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression.[1]

In the Glossary at the end of Improvisation for the Theatre, Spolin describes spontaneity as "a moment of explosion; a free moment of self-expression."[2] She also makes it very clear that, though she is working within the context of improvisation, spontaneity does not

mean 'making it up as you go along': ". . . inventiveness is not the same as spontaneity. A person may be most inventive without being spontaneous. The explosion does not take place when invention is merely cerebral and therefore only a part or abstraction of our total selves."[3]

To be a spontaneous actor is "to know objective reality and to be free to respond to it,"[4] whereas lack of spontaneity is the "tendency of an actor to lose his objective reality and begin to judge himself as he plays a scene; looking out to the audience to see if they 'like' his work; watching fellow actors instead of participating in scene; watching oneself."[5] This self-consciousness leads to "pre-planning"--deciding in advance <u>how</u> a scene will be played, rather than discovering the 'how' at the "actual moment of stage life." The result is "preventing the player in the formal theater from spontaneous stage behavior," because "the planned How kills spontaneity."[6]

Spolin presents a substantial terminology for that process of acting which is <u>not</u> spontaneous. Besides "inventiveness," she uses the terms "telling," "non-playing," "ad-libbing," "playwriting," "pretending," "preplanning," "manipulating," "imposing self on object," "intruding," "verbalizing," "generalizing," "emoting," "becoming audience," "story-playing," "role-playing," "psycho-drama," "self-absorption," "exhibitionism," "egocentricity," "performing," and "acting"; it is "subjective."[7]

By contrast, the spontaneous actor is described as "organic," "intuitive," "playing to the object," "experiencing," and "involved";

spontaneous acting means using "inner action," "communicating," "sharing," "playing," "physicalizing," "showing," and "responding"; it is "objective."[8]

Spolin deals with the characteristics of the spontaneous or non-spontaneous actor primarily from the point of view of the instructor. She does acknowledge, however, that both teacher and student must share the responsibility for recognizing the quality of spontaneity when and if it occurs: "The teacher-director must learn to know when the student-actor is actually experiencing, or little will be gained by the acting problem. Ask him!"[9] Spolin refers extensively to her work with non-professional actors in the improvisational medium, where the differences between the spontaneous and the unspontaneous can be more clearly perceived; amateur actors are, in her view, less likely to have developed the professional's 'bag of tricks' with which some audiences my be content. This places the greater responsibility on the teacher-director, then, rather than upon the student. Even so, Spolin describes some of the ways the student-actor can recognize spontaneity or lack of spontaneity within himself. Like Benedetti, she mentions the qualities of concentration, relaxation, emotional involvement, and physical ease and comfort while performing.

The actor who finds his concentration and focus wandering from the dramatic task at hand (Spolin's "Point of Concentration") into ways of portraying or presenting the character is being unspontaneous; concentration is sporadic.[10] Whatever the dramatic situation, the unspontaneous actor "intellectualizes the problem,"[11] dealing with

it cerebrally, and thus does not become emotionally involved in the situation (though he may impose his conception of an appropriate emotion onto the scene, or "emote").[12] The spontaneous actor, on the other hand, will find concentration relatively effortless, and focus easy to maintain. He discovers that emotions arise spontaneously out of the experience of playing.[13]

One of the most obvious ways that the actor can recognize spontaneity is by the ease and comfort of his body and voice, free from anxiety and nervous tension. If tension in body and voice remain generally constant and high, no matter what the emotional life of the scene may call for, or if he finds himself rebelling against the scene or exercise, or trying to control or manipulate the other actors in the scene, he may be sure his participation lacks spontaneity:[14]

> You will find that the student who previously covered up and insisted he was comfortable when first standing on stage will suddenly remember that his lips were dry or the palms of his hands were moist. Indeed, as their concern about self-exposure subsides, they will speak about their muscular tensions almost with relief.[15]

Spolin gives most of her attention, however, to ways the director-teacher can detect the presence or absence of spontaneity in student-actors. She presents a checklist of twenty-five qualities, most of which can be found in the unspontaneous (in these instances, "amateurish") actor:

1. Has stage fright
2. Does not know what to do with his hands
3. Has awkward stage movement--shifts back and forth, moves aimlessly about stage
4. Feels he must sit down on stage
5. Reads lines stiffly, mechanically; forgets lines

6. Has poor enunciation, rushes his speeches
7. Usually repeats a line he has misread
8. Mouthes the words of his fellow actors as they are playing
9. Creates no theater "business"
10. Has no sense of timing
11. Drops cues, is insensitive to pace
12. Wears his costume awkwardly; makeup has a stuck-on look
13. "Emotes" his lines rather than talks to his fellow actors
14. Is exhibitionistic
15. Has no feeling for characterization
16. "Breaks" on stage
17. Has a fear of touching others
18. Does not project his voice or his emotions
19. Cannot take direction
20. Has slight relationships to other actors or the play
21. Hangs on to furniture or props
22. Becomes his own audience
23. Never listens to other actors
24. Has no relationship to the audience
25. Casts eyes downward (does not look at fellow players)[16]

Though the list describes characteristics of the amateur (or amateurish) actor, and is, in Spolin's words, "horrendous," still, some of the qualities are manifested by unspontaneous actors in general. Spolin points particularly to "emoting," "exhibitionism," "having slight relationships to other actors or the play," "not listening," and "becoming his own audience": "Relationships will be sketchy, object contact

will be pedestrian, 'sharing' will be negligible. . . ."[17] The unspontaneous actor in improvisations will be preoccupied with gags, plot, or ad-libbing, and will rely on verbalization rather than on experiential involvement in the scene; in addition, ". . . his everyday body movement is stiff; and his isolation from his fellow actors is quite pronounced."[18]

It is clear that, for Spolin, the obverse of these negative characteristics holds true for the spontaneous actor. When imbued with the quality of spontaneity, for example, the actor's body becomes relaxed and natural, and he is aware of and responsive to the other actors on stage.[19] Any exercise where spontaneity is present "releases a flow of energy that results in group interaction and brings a natural quality in speech and movement."[20] Such an actor does not watch himself self-consciously. He is able to attend to what the other actors are saying and doing. His concentration is fully upon the world of the play; he is involved. In short, the spontaneous actor exhibits characteristics which are quite the opposite of those displayed by the actor who performs without spontaneity.

For Spolin, the recognition of the differences between spontaneous and non-spontaneous acting is a necessary first step in understanding her theory, a theory which is based upon the fundamental importance of spontaneity. Spolin is principally concerned with the value of spontaneity in the personal growth and development of the student actor, and only secondarily with artistic growth; it is her view, however, that one does not occur without affecting the other.

The importance of spontaneity in performance is likewise a function of the first two considerations. Otherwise, she believes, a premature focus upon performance will kill spontaneity: "Growth ceases as the performers take over. The more gifted and clever the players, the more difficult it is to discover this."[21] On the other hand, once an actor is able to achieve spontaneity in his personal training and class exercises, he can be ready to "share" with an audience. Indeed, this is Spolin's ultimate goal: "A moment of grandeur comes to everyone when they act out of their humanness without need for acceptance, exhibitionism, or applause. An audience knows this and responds accordingly."[22]

In all the actor's work, then, the aim as Spolin sees it is to develop as a human being, allowing these values to carry over into the world of the play, and to the audience: "It is by direct, dynamic awareness of an acting experience that experiencing and techniques are spontaneously wedded, freeing the student for the flowing, endless pattern of stage behavior. This, then, broadens the student-actor's ability to involve himself with his own phenomenal world and more personally to experience it."[23] To Spolin, spontaneity is the means by which the actor reaches out to his full potential as a human being:

> In this spontaneity, personal freedom is released, and the total person, physically, intellectually, and intuitively, is awakened. This causes enough excitation for the student to transcend himself--he is freed to go out into the environment, to explore, adventure, and face all dangers he meets unafraid."[24]

In the final analysis, spontaneity is what will eventually determine effectiveness as a professional actor:

> They (her acting students) were able to put the full range of spontaneity to work as they created scene after scene of

> fresh material. Involved with the structure and concentrating upon solving a different problem in each exercise, they gradually shed their mechanical behaviorisms, emoting, etc., and they entered into the stage reality freely and naturally, skilled in improvisational techniques and prepared to act difficult roles in written plays.[25]

In Spolin's theory, then, spontaneity is the quality of truth and freedom in acting--truth of emotional involvement and freedom from the need to falsify, imitate, or otherwise pretend to be emotionally involved in a dramatic situation. Her many terms reveal the different ways in which spontaneity and lack of spontaneity are manifested in the actor, and she delineates a substantial list of characteristics for either type of acting. Spolin also emphasizes the critical importance of spontaneity to her concept of acting and bases her entire approach to acting upon the need, first and foremost, for this vital quality.

Methodology

Viola Spolin's methodology regarding spontaneity is based upon a belief that spontaneity can be taught, that the actor can learn to consistently achieve and maintain this quality in his acting. To this end, it is necessary for Spolin that the instructor first understand the nature of the obstacles to spontaneity present within the actor, and then establish the conditions by which these obstacles can be avoided or overcome.

Like the other theoretricians, Viola Spolin cites attitudinal or motivational obstacles which lie at the root of lack of spontaneity. Spolin identifies one such obstacle in particular for a large number

of personal and artistic problems in the acting classroom. This critical block is "our need for favourable comment or interpretation by established authority." The result of this feeling that one must live up to someone else's expectations is "a serious (almost total) loss of personal experiencing. . . . Some in striving with approval/disapproval develop egocentricity and exhibitionism, some give up and simply go along."[26] When applied to the training of the actor, special problems result:

> Since participation in a theater activity is confused by many with exhibitionism (and therefore with the fear of exposure), the individual fancies himself one against many. He must single-handedly brave a large number of "malevolent-eyed" people sitting in judgment. The student, then, bent on proving himself, is constantly watching and judging himself and moves nowhere.[27]

One of the manifestations of this "watcher's"[28] attitude is the pre-planning of reactions which, when it occurs in the course of a scene or exercise, "throws players into 'performance' and/or playwriting, making the development of improvisers impossible and preventing the player in the formal theater from spontaneous stage behavior."[29] Another manifestation is "emoting," in which "old emotions" are 'lived out' and exploited by the actor, who uses the scene as a vehicle to display his own personal feelings (which, however deep and sincere, are not organic to the scene), rather than responding to it as the means by which organic new emotion can be generated.[30]

Spolin addresses these obstacles through a method designed to induce spontaneity in acting for, as she earlier states, "Spontaneity cannot come out of duality, out of being 'watched', whether it be the player watching himself or fearful of outside watchers."[31]

In Spolin's approach, the attitudinal and motivational obstacles are overcome (and spontaneity brought about) through physical activity, focused and directed by a 'Point-of-Concentration', an 'objective': "The objective upon which the player must constantly focus and towards which every action must be directed provokes spontaneity."[32] Spolin refers to these focused actions as "games."[33] It is through the physical phenomenon of the game and its objective that the intuitive processes are brought into involvement in acting; "The physical is the known, and through it we may find our way to the unknown, the intuitive, and perhaps beyond to man's spirit itself."[34]

For Spolin, the objective of the theater game is the "Point of Concentration,"[35] the task, the "something to do." By way of illustration, she describes an initial exercise in which a group of student-actors is sent up to the stage, to be watched by the audience. When their discomfort and self-consciousness become acute, Spolin gives them a task, such as counting the floorboards. Spolin observes that when they are engaged in a task, their self-consciousness disappears and they become relaxed and at ease. While this is a very simple example of the 'POC', Spolin structures sequentially more elaborate and complex exercises; all are based upon the Point of Concentration--a physical task or objective which inspires thought, emotion, action, and relationships between characters. Another, more complex example, is the exercise, "Changing Places":

> Any number of players.
> During playing, actors must be in constant re-formation. Any one of the actors may initiate movement. If any one actor moves, the other actors must instantly do likewise. If an actor goes down stage for instance, the other actors find a reason for moving up (or right and left).[36]

In this example, the Point of Concentration is "constant observation of fellow players."[37] In the exercise, "Silent Tension," two or more players are involved:

> Where, Who, and What agreed upon. Scene is played. Tension between players is so strong they are unable to speak. There will be no dialogue during this scene as a result. Where, Who, and What must be communicated through the silence. . . .
> EXAMPLES: Two players. Where--restaurant. Who--two sweethearts. What--have just broken their engagement. Three players. Where--bedroom. Who--old man who is dying, son, daughter-in-law. What--couple are waiting for his death, and he knows it. Four or more players. Where--mining area. Who--men, women, and children. What--waiting for news of missing men.[38]

Here the Point of Concentration is to find "a moment of intense involvement with fellow players where communication is made with the silence."[39]

Without the Point of Concentration, Spolin's assessment is that spontaneity cannot be achieved:

> The Point of Concentration is the magical focus that preoccupies and blanks the mind (the known), cleans the slate, and acts as a plumb-bob into our very own centers (the intuitive), breaking through the walls that keep us from the unknown, ourselves, and each other.[40]

Through the POC, Spolin's actors, like Benedetti's, participate not in an illusion, but in a theatrical reality;[41] and like Benedetti's "restful alertness" and Grotowski's "passive readiness," Spolin's "blank mindedness" is a state of being open to the spontaneous flow of energy, action, and emotion which will result from concentration upon the given task.

A question arises out of Spolin's methodology as to whether it is easier to concentrate on some types of POC's than on others. Spolin does not address the question at length, but indicates that the exercises are set out in an approximate sequence of easiest to most complex, and warns instructors not to take students too quickly

through the process, or to assign any of the more complex exercises outside their context, as the likelihood of spontaneity emerging in such events is much diminished. However, the specific criteria for what differentiates easier POC's from more difficult ones are not laid out directly by Spolin.

It is perhaps sufficient to conclude that, in Spolin's view, the problem of spontaneity is not one which can be solved at the outset of an actor's training, and then assumed to be part of his capabilities from then on. Rather, the generating of spontaneity must be consciously approached at every level of an actor's training and experience, from child-neophyte to working professional. The process of breaking down inhibitions and attitudes is less difficult, however, for those whose past training and experience has involved the pursuit and realization of spontaneity as a vital quality in their work:

> The exercises are cumulative and if used simultaneously will solve the above problems almost before they arise. In a short while students will all function organically, and when this occurs, the skills, techniques, and spontaneity needed in the theater will fast and forever become their own.[42]

Summary

For Viola Spolin, spontaneity is an elemental principle in her theory of acting and a cornerstone of her methodology. The actor's ability to participate in dramatic activity not with inhibition, self-consciousness, or exhibitionism, but with honesty, complete concentration, and commitment, is a central objective of her work. The instructor or director plays a significant part in this process, particularly in helping the actor to overcome the psychological obstacles

of certain motivations and attitudes which block spontaneity. The overcoming of these obstacles and the achievement of spontaneity are two aspects of one process. For Spolin, this process is the result of perceiving and experiencing theatrical realities as games--physical activity focused and directed by the objective, the 'Point of Concentration'.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Spolin, Viola. Improvisation for the Theatre. Northwestern University Press. Evanston, Ill., 1963. p. 4

[2]Ibid. p. 392 [3]Ibid. p. 40 [4]Ibid. p. 34

[5]Ibid. p. 378 [6]Ibid. p. 35 [7]Ibid. pp. 377-95

[8]Ibid. [9]Ibid. p. 41 [10]Ibid. p. 98 [11]Ibid. p. 68

[12]Ibid. p. 238 [13]Ibid. p. 237 [14]Ibid. p. 25

[15]Ibid. p. 52 [16]Ibid. pp. 370-1 [17]Ibid. p. 98

[18]Ibid. p. 121 [19]Ibid. p. 51 [20]Ibid. p. 66

[21]Ibid. p. 43 [22]Ibid. p. 44 [23]Ibid. pp. 14-5

[24]Ibid. p. 6 [25]Ibid. p. x [26]Ibid. p. 7

[27]Ibid. p. 10 [28]Ibid. p. 393 [29]Ibid. p. 35

[30]Ibid. p. 238 [31]Ibid. p. 24 [32]Ibid. pp. 4-5

[33]Ibid. [34]Ibid. p. 16 [35]Ibid. p. 53

[36]Ibid. pp. 165-66 [37]Ibid. [38]Ibid. pp. 188-9

[39]Ibid. [40]Ibid. p. 24 [41]Ibid. p. 41

[42]Ibid. p. 374

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the theories and methodologies of Stanislavski, Boleslavsky, Chekhov, Grotowski, Benedetti, and Spolin regarding the subject of spontaneity in acting, reveals an essential similarity in their understanding and interpretation of the concept of spontaneity. This commonality of theory extends to the definition of spontaneity, the delineation of its characteristics, and its importance to the acting process. Their methodologies for achieving spontaneity are much more diverse, reflecting different teaching patterns and emphasis; there are, however, a number of similarities among them.

Theory

In analyzing the theoretical views of the theoretricians concerning the nature and definition of spontaneity, it becomes evident that three kinds of spontaneity are identified within the acting process. These are: spontaneity of will; spontaneity of action; and spontaneity of emotion. Not all are identified by every theoretrician and only one, spontaneity of emotion, is identified by all.

In spontaneity of will, the specific desires, aims, wishes, or needs of the character rise within the actor without conscious effort or deliberation. Stanislavski, Chekhov, and Grotowski all put forward approaches to achieve spontaneity of will. Spontaneity of

action is the spontaneous generation of what is said and done by the character, specifically how the character behaves on the stage. Spontaneity of action is an integral part of the theories of Stanislavski, Chekhov, Grotowski, Benedetti, and Spolin, and is also implicit in a part of Boleslavsky's work. All six theoretricians place spontaneity of emotion at the heart of their theoretical views. In spontaneity of emotion, the actor experiences the emotional life of the character. The emotions he experiences are not imposed upon the character from outside, but occur of themselves as a result of living the life of the character. Thus, he does not experience his own anger, but the anger of the character. This distinction between the actor experiencing his own emotions and experiencing the emotions of the character is a subtle one, often not clearly articulated by the theoretricians. Michael Chekhov makes the clearest distinction; in his view, the actor does not experience his own 'everyday' feelings on stage, but deeper, 'artistic' feelings which are uniquely and specifically generated by the circumstances of the play. From the numerous references made by all the theoretricians relative to the importance of 'experiencing the character', it seems likely that Chekhov's perspective is generally shared.

The definitive element in spontaneity is identified by all six theoretricians as an absence, withholding, or lack of engagement of the actors' logical, analytical, decision-making processes at the moment of spontaneity. These 'thinking' processes act as inhibitors to the direct access of the actor's body to his inner feelings and desires, and also inhibit the reverse process of direct expression

by the body of this inner life. In spontaneity, therefore, there is and can be no conscious effort on the part of the actor to either experience or express his inner emotions. This does not mean that the thought processes are not required in acting, but that they only come into play in establishing the conditions, the 'conscious technique' (Stanislavski), the 'artificialities' (Grotowski), the 'necessities' (Chekhov) through which spontaneity of will, or action, or emotion, can be achieved. For all the theoretricians, spontaneity is the quality of acting wherein direct interactions take place between the actor's body and his subconscious, between his physical self and his psychological self.

The other significant understanding shared by the theoretricians concerning the nature of spontaneity is that all acting is either spontaneous or unspontaneous. The quality is either present in an actor's work, or it is absent. Nowhere do any of the theoretricians suggest that there are 'degrees' of spontaneity, that an actor's acting can be partly, faintly, or very spontaneous. Use of the phrase, 'living a part' to describe spontaneous acting is in this way appropriate, in that, like life itself, spontaneity is an absolute.

The terminologies put forward by the six theoretricians concerning spontaneity are extensive, often highly individualistic, and, as a result, occasionally confusing or contradictory. They do, however, reveal a common understanding of the nature of spontaneity (and lack of spontaneity). The most common terms used to describe spontaneous acting are 'experiencing the character', 'living the character', and

'living' or 're-living' one's part. Unspontaneous acting is described most often as 'pretending', 'presenting', and 'exhibiting'. Grotowski uses the terms 'experiencing' and 'imitating' to define the two different conditions. Benedetti's terms are 're-living' vs. 'living one's part'; lack of spontaneity is 'imitative' and 'mechanical', and Stanislavski adds numerous other terms such as 'representational', 'generalized', and 'cliche'. Chekhov identifies the difference between spontaneous and unspontaneous acting as 'psychological' vs. 'logical', 'true' vs. 'untrue', 'improvisational' vs. 'pretended'. Spolin offers an extensive terminology for the antithetical concepts, and offers two terms which are most reflective of the nature of spontaneity: 'discovering' vs. 'deciding'. To act spontaneously is to discover certain aspects of the character--his desires, his ways of speaking and acting, or his underlying emotions; to act unspontaneously is to decide all of these things about the character, especially his emotions and the way in which they should be expressed.

Occasionally the terminology is contradictory; however, a closer examination of the context of the conflicting terms reveals that the underlying concept is not at issue. The problem is generally one of semantics. For example, Spolin uses the term 'artificial' to describe non-spontaneous acting, while Grotowski uses the same word to delineate the fixed elements of the role which provide the framework for spontaneity. What Grotowski calls 'artificialities', Spolin refers to as 'points of concentration'--the elements upon which the actor focuses and through which spontaneity is achieved. Another example is Chekhov's rejection of the phrase, 'living one's part'.

What he actually rejects is the interpretation of the phrase which implies that the actor must substitute his own emotions and personality for that of the character. Stanislavski, who first uses the phrase, also rejected kind of self-indulgent process which Chekhov feels is implicit in the term, 'living one's part', calling such acting 'hysterical'. Boleslavsky, like Stanislavski, employs the term 'living one's part', and he, too, rejected the 'nakedness' of putting one's own feelings on the stage. In both these examples, the theoretricians are in agreement about basic concepts, but have adopted or rejected certain terms on the basis of personal, connotative preference.

Some terms are not employed contradictorily, but are used in slightly differing contexts. The word, 'score', for example, is utilized by Stanislavski, Chekhov, and Grotowski. Stanislavski uses it in reference to the 'score of objectives' which make up the substance of a role; Chekhov refers to the 'score of atmospheres' that an actor may discover in a play; for Grotowski the 'score' is the entire composition of the role, including objectives, actions, impulses, qualities of voice and movement, words, intonations, and thoughts. For all three, the 'score' acts as a stimulus to spontaneity, though the precise nature of the stimuli within each of their 'scores' varies. Another such term is 'centering', which is the name of specific imagination exercises developed by Chekhov and Benedetti. In each instance 'centering' refers to the focusing of concentration and energy by the actor. Chekhov also uses the term in another context, however, to describe an exercise in developing characterization. The term gains a context which Benedetti's does not have, as Chekhov's exercise in

'character-centering' involves the transformation of the actor into the full emotional life of the character, while Benedetti's exercise stimulates the actor to word and action without causing a transformation into role.

The term, improvisation, is accorded slightly different meanings as well, by Chekhov, Grotowski, and Spolin. For Chekhov 'improvisation' is essentially a synonym for spontaneous acting, as the actor must approach every rehearsal and performance improvisationally, using the established words, gestures, actions, and 'business' to stimulate his experiencing of the character; for Chekhov, 'improvisation' is another word for the quality of spontaneity in acting. Grotowski's application of the term is narrower. For him, improvisation is a specific dramatic form wherein a framework of details is set and from which a number of unpremeditated variations in word, action, and response are possible. Spolin's definition contains elements of both Chekhov's and Grotowski's meanings, as she refers to 'improvisation' as a quality of acting identified as spontaneous, and also as a particular dramatic form wherein a number of variations of spontaneous response are possible. All three are in agreement that improvisation does not mean 'making it up as one goes along', or imposing ideas, actions, or emotions onto the line of dramatic action. True improvisation is not consciously controlled; it is a spontaneous, 'organic' process.

The terminology put forward by the theoretricians reflects the consistency of their views on the nature of spontaneity. With few exceptions, there is among them a common vocabulary for spontane-

ity (and lack of spontaneity) which reveals a common understanding and experience of the concept. When exceptions are examined, they reinforce the conclusion that the theoretricians do not differ in their understanding of spontaneity, but have opted for using the same word to label different aspects of the concept, or differing words for the same essential aspects of the concept.

In the views of the theoretricians, most of the characteristics of spontaneity in acting can and should be perceived by the actor himself. A few manifestations may also be consciously noted by the spectator, but generally the effects of spontaneity upon an audience are subconscious. It becomes evident in examining their views concerning the characteristics of spontaneity, and lack of spontaneity, that there are a number of commonly identified manifestations of the two conditions of acting. Characteristics of spontaneity include: a sense of relaxation, of physical ease and comfort; a heightened sense of concentration; the actor's dualistic awareness of the character and of himself, where the latter awareness does not inhibit his experiencing of the character; an ability to perceive and respond to the circumstances of the play, and especially to the other characters on stage; and a sense of moment-to-moment emotional involvement in the play.

Characteristics of lack of spontaneity are also commonly recognized, and are basically the opposites to the characteristics of spontaneity. They include: excess physical tension, nervousness, stiffness, and awkwardness; distractibility; a superficial awareness of his character, coupled with a very strong sense of the audience and

his role as performer; lack of or superficial awareness of the play's circumstances and of the other characters on stage, with a subsequent inability to respond to either; no through-line of emotional involvement in the play--any emotions which are experienced are sporadic, momentary, out of context, or forced.

All of the above characteristics are manifested first, often solely, to the actor. The perceptive director/teacher or sophisticated audience member will be sensitive and conscious of some of them; usually, however, spontaneity manifests itself to the audience indirectly, by the effectiveness of the play and the acting. Thus, the spectator may depart disappointed or dissatisfied after witnessing a non-spontaneous performance without identifying lack of spontaneity as the cause; or he may leave satisfied at a particular level, not realizing that he has actually missed out on the deeper, more lasting experience he would have received had the acting been characterized by spontaneity.

The only significant difference between any of the six theoretical assessments of the characteristics of spontaneity lies in the descriptions of the actor's awareness of, and relationship to, the audience. Chekhov discusses the responsibility of an actor toward his audience, but nowhere does he state or imply that the actor needs to focus his attention upon them during his performance, as his focus should be on the 'main line of events'; Boleslavsky likewise does not specify whether the actor should or should not be aware of the audience, simply that he is not pre-occupied with them. Stanislavski, however, specifies that the spontaneous actor will 'forget entirely about his audience', and will concentrate solely on the play and the characters.

Grotowski takes an opposite view to Stanislavski's, maintaining that an awareness of the audience is unavoidable and even essential, so long as the actor is not pre-occupied with how they are reacting to him or with whether or not he is communicating with them. Benedetti is quite explicit that the spontaneous actor is dually conscious of audience and the world of the play, with his focus on his dramatic task.[1] Spolin states that one characteristic of the non-spontaneous actor is that he has "no relationship to the audience," and emphasizes that the spontaneous actor will 'share' with the audience, and be perceptive to "the feel and the rhythm" of the audience, even though he does not actively focus his attention upon them.[2] Spolin also states, however, that "spontaneity cannot come out of duality,"[3] thus leaving a somewhat contradictory impression about her point of view. The contradiction seems resolvable only if one infers that the duality to which she refers is one of focus rather than of awareness. This inference seems consistent with her general perspective regarding concentration in the spontaneous actor. In Stanislavski's case as well, the conflict may only be an apparent one, as he may only be emphasizing, in his use of the word 'forget', that the actor's full, <u>conscious</u> attention should be on the play. Neither he nor Spolin state or imply that a <u>subconscious</u> awareness of the audience is a reflection of lack of spontaneity.

For all six theoretricians, spontaneity is the single most essential quality in acting. It is essential for the actor's development as a creative artist and it is essential for the affectiveness

of his performance. Boleslavsky implies that non-spontaneous acting does not result in 'theatre' at all, though Stanislavski is less extreme, referring to non-spontaneous acting simply as a lesser art form with limited potential for the actor and for the audience. For Grotowski, any acting process which lacks spontaneity is not a creative process, and is therefore of little value to the actor's own development or to his conception of theatre. Benedetti likewise believes that the actor owes to his audience the 'acuteness and completeness' of experience made possible through spontaneity. Chekhov, too, emphasizes that the depth and quality of the theatrical experience for an audience is only possible through an acting process which is spontaneous.

Methodology

As reflected in all of their methodologies, it is the view of each of the theoretricians that spontaneity can be taught and that the actor can learn to perceive and control those elements by which spontaneity can be consistently achieved. Each theoretrician has devoted considerable time and effort to the development of a methodology which accomplishes this purpose.

In the estimation of four of the theoretricians, it does not appear that the obstacles to spontaneity must be overcome before the actor can learn to achieve spontaneity. With the exception of Boleslavsky and Benedetti, the processes of overcoming whatever resistances exist within the actor will, of themselves, achieve spontaneity at one and the same time. Boleslavsky and Benedetti suggest other techniques for overcoming these resistances, which are not designed

to achieve spontaneity of themselves, but which establish favourable conditions for the subsequent application of approaches which enable the actor to achieve spontaneity.

There are essentially two causes for lack of spontaneity in acting: one is motivational or attitudinal; the other is experiential. Motivational causes are described by all six theoretricians and include varying degrees of fear or anxiety, desires to impress or please, and social or professional aspirations. Experiential causes of lack of spontaneity are the bad habits and techniques picked up by the actor through poor or inadequate training or through coping with roles for which he is improperly prepared or equipped. Inadequate training is also mentioned by all of the theoretricians.

Whether the cause of lack of spontaneity is attitudinal or experiential, it inevitably manifests itself in an acting process which is controlled by the actor's logical, conscious, analytical, decision-making processes. This objectifying, distancing consciousness of self results in the actor, in Spolin's words, 'becoming audience', watching his own performance and admiring, criticizing, and manipulating it as it happens. There is, consequently, no opportunity for spontaneity to occur. All the non-spontaneous processes of acting described by the theoretricians show evidence of not being processes at all, but products of the generalizing, selective functionings of the actor's conscious mind. The 'representative', the 'mechanical', the 'imitative', the 'rote', the 'general', the 'hysterical', and the 'exhibiting' actor are all engaged in pretense--and pretense is a product of analysis, generalization, and selection. Several of the

theoretricians acknowledge that 'pretending' actors can be extremely quick and clever, thus presenting the illusion of spontaneity to the audience. In order for the actor to be truly and consistently effective in performance, however, he must find ways to allow his non-conscious, non-analytical, emotional processes to assert themselves.

A key methodological aspect of spontaneity which is identified by all six theoretricians is the particular state of the actor's mind and body when engaged in spontaneous acting. Each one offers a different name to this state: for Spolin, it is 'blankmindedness'; for Benedetti, 'restful alertness'; for Grotowski, 'passive readiness'; Chekhov's term is 'Creative Imagination'; Boleslavsky's is 'Spiritual Concentration'; and Stanislavski's is the 'creative state'. All of these states are characterized by the actor's physical, mental, and emotional readiness and subsequent ability to enter into the life of his character, to respond to the various circumstances presented by the play. For all the theoretricians the components of this psycho-physical state are the same: the actor is physically relaxed; his attention is concentrated on the particular stimulus or set of stimuli presented by his character and the play; his imagination provides him with a sense of belief and commitment about what is occurring on the stage. For Spolin, and for Grotowski, the achievement of this state is more a manifestation of spontaneity than it is a methodology for achieving spontaneity. The others appear to regard the state as both a manifestation of, and an approach to, spontaneity.

The ways in which the theoretricians approach the achievement of spontaneity in acting vary in quantity, in nature, and in structure.

In terms of quantity, Viola Spolin is at one end of the scale with a single approach, the 'Point of Concentration'. Chekhov presents the greatest number of approaches: 'imagination'; 'improvisation'; 'atmosphere'; 'sensations'; 'Psychological Gestures'; 'characterization'; and 'objectives'. Stanislavski presents four approaches, while Grotowski, Boleslavsky, and Benedetti each adopt a single approach. Unlike Spolin, however, the approaches of these latter three specify three or four different aspects including relaxation, concentration, action, objectives, and/or rhythm, structured consecutively; Spolin's approach, while embodying more than one of these aspects, does not involve exercises which single out any one aspect.

The approaches put forward by the theoretricians also vary according to the nature of spontaneity which they achieve. All the theoretricians present at least one approach for achieving spontaneity of emotion. Stanislavski, Chekhov, Spolin, and Benedetti also present approaches to spontaneity of action. Stanislavski and Chekhov further offer approaches to spontaneity of 'will'. Grotowski's 'via negativa' approach is designed to generate all three kinds of spontaneity.

The ways in which approaches to spontaneity are structured vary considerably. The main differences are in the sequencing or non-sequencing of approaches. Benedetti, Grotowski, and Boleslavsky each adopt a single sequenced approach. Benedetti's process begins with the achievement of the state of 'restful alertness' through exercises in relaxation, concentration, and imagination. In this state the actor is presented with the various stimuli provided by the play, including the assimilation into his body of the physical traits of

his character. These stimuli prompt him into a spontaneous, active response, which also generates spontaneity of emotion. Grotowski's initial process also involves the achievement of 'passive readiness', but not through general exercises in relaxation, concentration, and imagination; Grotowski tailors individual sets of 'psycho-physical' exercises designed to overcome the physical and psychological 'blocks' within the actor (in rehearsal and performance, these exercises are replaced by the 'score' of the role). It is in the process of overcoming these blocks that the actor achieves simultaneously the state of 'passive readiness' and spontaneity of will, action, and emotion. Boleslavsky's main concern is with spontaneity of emotion; his direct approach to it is via "Rhythm'--the quality of actions. The other aspects of his process, 'Spiritual Concentration', 'Affective Memory', and 'Dramatic Action', lead sequentially to the condition in which 'Rhythm' can spontaneously affect the actor's emotional experiencing of his role. Stanislavski, Chekhov, and Spolin approach the structuring of their approaches differently than do the other three. Neither Stanislavski nor Chekhov emphasizes sequencing of his approaches. Stanislavski implies that all his approaches should be actively explored in the process of developing a character (like Boleslavsky, however, he emphasizes the importance of 'Rhythm' or 'tempo-rhythm' for spontaneity in performance). Chekhov indicates that exploring one or two of his seven approaches may be sufficient to provide a 'way in' to spontaneity in rehearsal and in performance. Spolin's single approach to spontaneity has already been mentioned.

It is implicit in each methodology that any of its approaches and exercises may be adapted and modified to suit the particular actor,

play, or acting problem. There is a considerable variation, then, in the number, nature, and structure of approaches to spontaneity.

For all the theoretricians, spontaneity is an important quality in both the rehearsal process of the actor and in his performance. Some, like Chekhov and Grotowski, believe that spontaneity should characterize every aspect of the process--that every decision should be the result of a spontaneous discovery by the actor. Others, like Boleslavsky, believe that the conscious, selective processes play an active role in the creation of a character. He maintains that certain discoveries occur spontaneously, and so long as the performance itself achieves the quality of spontaneity, reflective, conscious decision-making may be a frequent tool of the actor. Stanislavski, Benedetti, and Spolin lie midpoint on the scale in this regard. Whether in rehearsal or in performance, all are in agreement upon the necessity of suspending the conscious decision-making processes at the moment of spontaneity.

Summary

The following conclusions may be drawn from the theoretricians regarding a theory of spontaneity:

1. Three kinds of spontaneity in acting can be identified: spontaneity of will; spontaneity of action; and spontaneity of emotion
2. Spontaneity in acting requires an absence, withholding, or lack of engagement of the actor's logical, analytical, decision-making processes

3. Spontaneity is the quality of acting wherein direct interactions take place between the actor's body and his subconscious
4. At any given moment, acting is either spontaneous or unspontaneous; there are no 'degrees' of spontaneity
5. An extensive terminology exists to describe the difference between spontaneous and unspontaneous acting
6. Spontaneity is characterized in the actor by a number of sensations and capabilities, including: a sense of ease and confidence; a heightened ability to concentrate; a dualistic awareness of himself and the character, and of the play and the audience (awareness of the audience is solely at a subconscious level); an ability to actively perceive and respond to the stage reality; an ability to experience the emotions of the character
7. Spontaneity is the single most important quality in acting. It is essential for the effectiveness of the actor's performance before an audience and for his own development as a creative artist

In examining the methodologies of the six theoretricians, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Spontaneity can be taught; that is, the actor can be instructed and trained in the means by which he can consistently and predictably achieve spontaneity in his acting
2. Implicit in the achievement of spontaneity is the overcoming of obstacles to spontaneity which reside within the actor; achieving spontaneity and overcoming the obstacles to it are two ways of describing what is essentially one process
3. Causes of lack of spontaneity are primarily attitudinal, residing

in the motivations of the actor, and, secondarily, experiential, the result of poor or inadequate training

4. The main obstacles to spontaneity (caused by the above attitudinal and experiential factors) are the self-conscious, logical, analytical, and decision-making processes of the actor's mind
5. Spontaneity in acting is characterized by a particular psychophysical state within the actor. Sometimes spontaneity is achieved through entry into this state, and sometimes the state is simply a by-product of spontaneity. The three aspects of this state are: relaxation; concentration; and imagination
6. Spontaneity in acting is usually (though not always) sought in the rehearsal process but it is always necessary in performance
7. There are many different approaches to achieving spontaneity in acting
8. Every approach to achieving spontaneity is based on the principle of 'from conscious technique to the subconscious creation of artistic truth'. That is, spontaneity is achieved through the conscious manipulation of real or imaginary phenomena

Spontaneity is the primary focus of the theory and the methodology of each of the theoretricians. No theoretical principle running counter to the concept of spontaneity, nor any technique or method designed to inhibit spontaneity, is present in any of their examined works.

Every theoretical and methodological approach to spontaneity outlined by the theoretricians is based upon the concept of direct

interaction between the actor's physical being--his body, perceptions, and sensations--and his subconscious being--desires, needs, impulses, and emotions. Whenever the actor's physical being is subjected to real or imaginary phenomena, there is a direct and immediate effect upon his subconscious being. Likewise, any stirrings in his subconscious being have an immediate and direct effect upon the activity of his physical being (this activity may be as overt as a gesture, or as imperceptible as a heartbeat). The methodologies put forward are all designed to allow the actor to experience this process, <u>at will</u>. Because of this direct interplay between inner and outer being, the actor is enabled to experience the desires of the character, to live the actions of the character, and to feel the emotions of the character. His acting becomes spontaneous.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Benedetti, Robert. The Actor at Work. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976. p. 70

[2]Spolin, Viola. Improvisation for the Theatre. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963. pp. 37.-4

[3]Ibid. p.24

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